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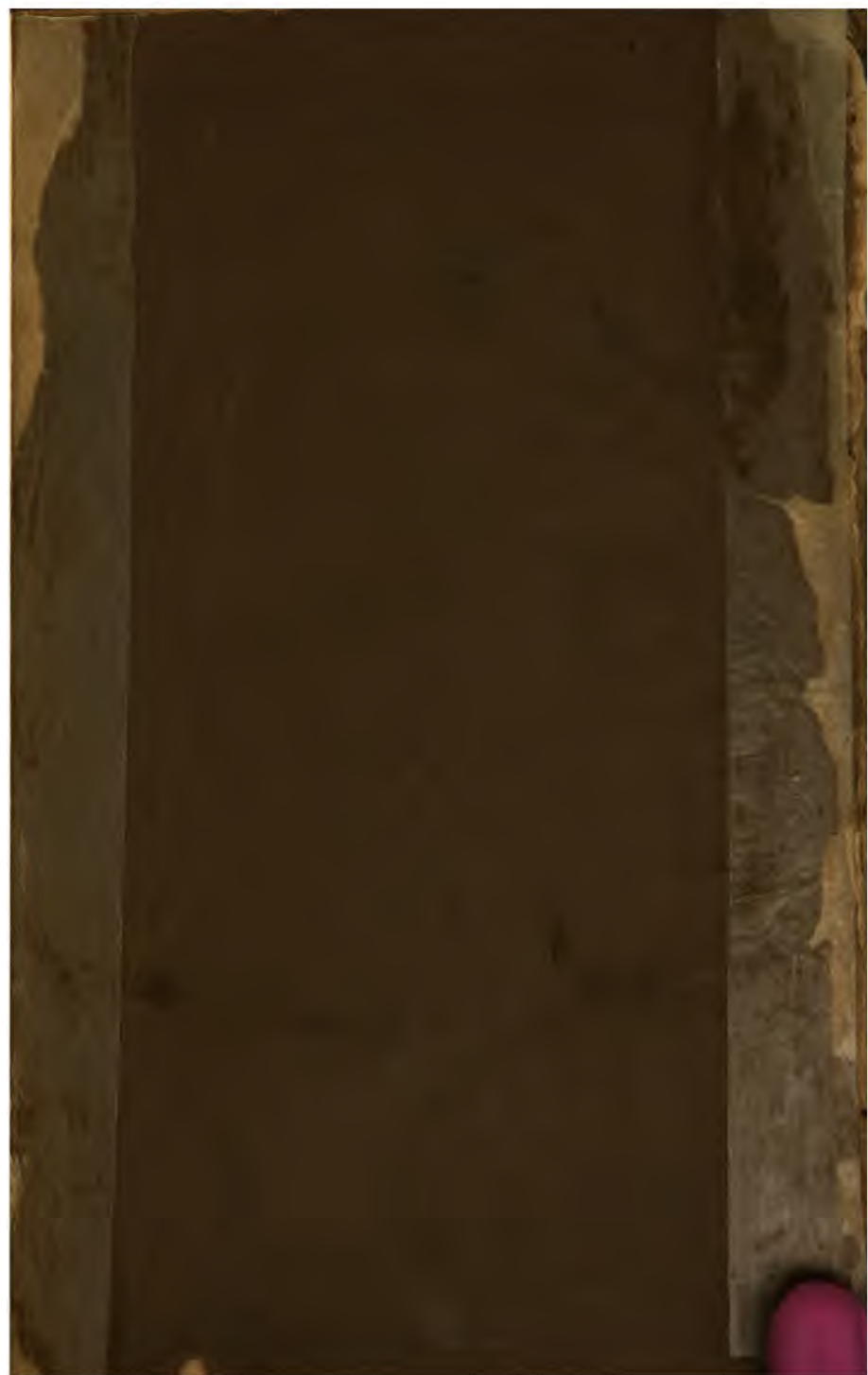
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SOME IMPORTANT  
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ANSWERED,  
AT THE  
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On *Wednesday* EVENINGS,  
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By S. PIKE and S. HAYWARD.

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Jer. vi. 16. *Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the Ways, and see, and ask for the old Paths, where is the good Way; and walk therein, and ye shall find Rest for your Souls.*

Luke xii. 42. *And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise Steward, whom his Lord shall make Ruler over his Household, to give them their Portion of Meat in due Season?*

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L O N D O N:

Printed and Sold by J. BUCKLAND, at the *Buck*, in *Pater-noster-Row*; T. FIELD, at the *Wheat-sheaf*, the upper End of *Cheapside*; E. DILLY, at the *Rose and Crown*, in the *Poultry*; and J. ROBINSON, at *Dock head, Southwark.* 1755.

SOME IMPORTANT

# CASES OF CONSCIENCE

AND

THE

CRIMINAL RECORDS

OF THE

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IN THE



## LIST of the CASES.

### CASE I.

HOW shall we distinguish between the Workings of natural Affection, and the real Exercise of Grace, in religious Duties? S. PYKE.

CASE II. What Methods must a Christian, in declining Circumstances, take to recover a healthful and vigorous Frame of Soul, so as to be able to maintain real and close Communion with God amidst the Hurries and Business of this World? S. HAYWARD.

CASE III. A serious Person, who scruples to comply with the usual Practice of playing at Cards, desires to know whether these Scruples arise from a needless Tenderness of Conscience, or from the faithful Monitions of the Spirit of God? S. PYKE.

CASE IV. How may a Person judge, when a Promise or Threatning comes from God, or is brought by Satan to the Soul? S. HAYWARD.

CASE V. How far may a Person judge of the Strength or Weakness of his Faith by the Brightness or Darkness of his Frames? S. PYKE.

CASE VI. Whether a Person, who has been a great Sinner, has any Ground to expect Pardon, and the Comforts

*A LIST of the CASES.*  
Comforts of the Holy Ghost; and whether he may partake of all the Ordinances of God? S. HAYWARD.

CASE VII. What Judgment should that Person pass upon himself, who knows himself to be in a dark and corrupt Frame, but finds himself greatly unaffected with it, and stupid under it? S. PIKE.

CASE VIII. How may the Times of Family and Closet Duty be best regulated, to the Glory of God, our own Comfort, and the Advantage of those about us? S. HAYWARD.

CASE IX. Is it not presumptuous for a Person to hope he has an Interest in Christ, when he sees little or nothing in himself, but Reason to doubt and question it? S. PIKE.

CASE X. Is going to Plays and other theatrical Performances consistent with the Profession and Practice of Christianity? S. HAYWARD.

CASE XI. How may a Person, who is desirous of following the Dictates of Providence in every Respect, know the Mind and Will of God in any particular Circumstance, whether temporal or spiritual? S. PIKE.

CASE XII. Should not a Person, who is not comfortably persuaded of his being a real Christian, abstain from the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lest he should eat and drink Damnation to himself? — And, what Method must that Person take to satisfy a Church of Christ of his being a real Christian, who cannot relate any particular Experience of the Dealings of God with his Soul? S. HAYWARD.

THE



T H E

# P R E F A C E.

*THE following Answers were, amongst others, delivered in a weekly Exercise, during the last Winter, with a View to remove the Doubts of the timorous Christian, quicken him in his Way to Zion, to guard against presumptuous Hopes, and promote the Life of Religion in the Soul. That these important Ends might be answered, the Auditory were desired to supply us with serious Cases of Conscience, arising from the Difficulties they met with in the Course of their Experience, and to conceal their Names, that so they might with the greater Freedom propose their respective Cases, and that we, in our Solution of them, might be kept from the least Degree of Fear or Restraint.*

*Through the repeated Importunities of our Friends, and from satisfactory Evidences of Usefulness, we have been prevailed upon to commit to public View twelve of these Answers, though somewhat contracted. And we hope, that those, into whose Hands they may come, will read them with Christian Candour. And may the Spirit of God, without whose peculiar Blessing all Attempts will be ineffectual to answer any saving Purposes, make these a powerful Means of bringing them nearer to Christ, and of making them more lively and active in his Service! If this happy End is but in the least answered, we shall rejoice, and give God all the Glory, disregarding all the little Contempt that may be cast upon us and our imperfect Labours.*

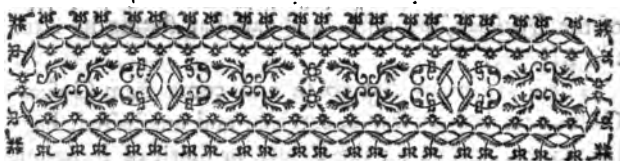
## THE PREFACE.

*It must be acknowledged to be a very difficult and critical Work to distribute to every one their proper Portion, and so to divide the Word of Truth, as to give suitable Encouragement to those to whom it belongs, and yet to leave the Hypocrite or presumptuous Sinner no Room to hope. It is equally difficult to attempt to destroy the vain Confidence of the Sinner, without disturbing the Peace, and discouraging the Minds, of those who are the real Followers of Jesus. Who is sufficient for these Things? We readily confess our Insufficiency; but yet hope, that the Lord has enabled us to be in some Measure faithful, so far as our spiritual Skill extends: And may he enable you who read to read faithfully with your own Souls, that to witness our Labours, and your Perusal, may be in vain!*

London,  
May 30, 1755.

S. PIKE,  
S. HAYWARD.

CASE



# CASES OF CONSCIENCE.

## CASE I.

*How shall we distinguish between the Workings of natural Affection, and the real Exercise of Grace, in religious Duties?*

**T**HIS serious Question lately came into my Hands in these very Words; and, upon reading it, I could not but see that it contained a Query of the greatest Importance, and therefore thought it might be very proper, to take it into Consideration, and give it as clear a Solution as lay in my Power.

I confess it to be a very close and interesting Inquiry, such as requires some Skill to answer it, but much more spiritual Skill to apply it to our own Hearts and Cases. You will easily see both the Importance and Difficulty

of the Question, by a free and familiar stating it, after this Manner.

There are many that go to and come from Gospel-Ordinances intirely stupid, careless, and unaffected, having no real Regard for the Power or Spirit of Religion, and aiming at no more than the Form of it. To such as these the present Query is an indifferent Matter; and their very Indifference is an evident Proof, that the State of their Persons, or the Frame of their Hearts, is really sad and deplorable, though they know it not, or are utterly unconcerned about it.

There are others, who, when they attend upon or engage in religious Duties, such as Reading, Hearing, Singing and Praying, have their Affections strongly moving; so that these Persons can, and do frequently, weep under Ordinances for Grief or Joy: They often attend the Means of Grace with much Pleasure in their Countenances, and many Tears in their Eyes. These Appearances, I profess, are very pleasing and promising in an Assembly, and sometimes indicate that the Spirit of God is at work in their Hearts: And many Christians are ready to take it for granted, that those Ordinances are truly beneficial, where the Passions are thus agitated, and to esteem those lost Opportunities, where this is not the Case.

But here I must observe, that we have great Reasons to be suspicious of ourselves, and should not make this the Rule to judge of the Usefulness of an Ordinance by; but make a farther Inquiry, whether these Motions within us, or these Impressions upon us, are the Workings of natural Affection only, as they certainly may be, or the real Exercise of spiritual Grace?

And this is the very Question under Consideration. Many, I fear, are awfully deceived with the mere Workings

CASE I.] *Cases of Conscience.*

3

ings of Nature; by thinking them sufficient Evidences of the Presence and Blessing of God in his own Institutions; while, on the other hand, many are *groundlessly discouraged*, because they do not feel such strong Emotions as others do; thinking that this is an evident Token of the Barrenness and Uselessness of Ordinances:

That we might not be either deceived, or unreasonably discouraged, by these Means, let me therefore now attempt a serious and plain Solution of this Query, looking up to the Divine Spirit to make the whole clear to your Understandings, and to apply it close to your Consciences.

I would offer the following Considerations as preparatory to a direct Answer, and then proceed to the Solution itself:

Observe I. *The Affections of the Mind may be excited in a merely natural Way under divine Ordinances.* The Proof of this Point will be best introduced by endeavour to set before you some of those Ways, in which mere Nature may be impressed and raised under the Means of Grace. 1. The Affections of the Mind may be excited by a *natural Impression*. Thus, when a Person is attending upon the Ministrations of the Word, he may find himself moved only by the Beauty of the Style, or the Propriety of the Language, or by the Loudness or Tuneableness of the Preacher's Voice, or the apparent Fervency of his Address. Such Circumstances as these may move the Affections in a Way purely mechanical, without being attended with any spiritual or saving Effects; for hereby only animal Nature is touched, or the speculative Powers employed, in a pleasing or disagreeable Way. This seems to have been the Case with the Hearers of the great Prophet *Ezekiel*, as mentioned *Ezek. xxxiii.* 32. *Lo, thou art unto them as a*

*very lovely Song of one that has a pleasant Voice, and can play well on an Instrument; for they hear thy Words; but do them not.* Let not any therefore conclude, that Ordinances are profitable to them, merely because they are pleasing and delightful to their Ears; for the Manner of the Preacher's Address may make a natural Impression upon his Hearers, without having any spiritual or useful Effect. 2. The Affections may be sometimes raised by a *natural Sympathy*; which Sympathy regards not merely the *Manner* of the Preacher, but the *Matter* also, which he delivers. If the Preacher himself appears very earnest in his Address, and very much affected with what he delivers; this does often effectually work upon the natural Affections of his Hearers by way of Sympathy. If he appears concerned, they feel a sympathetic Concern along with him: If he seems raised and delighted, they by Sympathy partake of his Pleasure to such a Degree, as actually to weep and rejoice with him. Again, if the Minister be setting forth something, that is in its own Nature very affecting, in expressive Language, here the Power of Oratory produces in the Minds of the Hearers a Sympathy with that which he is relating or describing. Thus, if the Minister be setting forth in very mournful Strains the Sufferings and Agonies of Christ, his Relation of these tragical Occurrences may move the Affections of the People merely in a sympathetic Way, without making any saying or spiritual Impressions on their Hearts; and there may be no more in these Workings of Affection, than what most Persons, I believe, are obliged to feel, when attentively reading that memorable History of *Joseph* and his Brethren, whereby the Affections of Joy and Sorrow, Resentment and Pleasure, are alternately excited in a Way purely natural. 3. The Affections are

are sometimes raised under Ordinances from a purely *natural* or *notional* Inclination. A Person may meet with that in a Sermon, which suits his Taste, or falls in with his previous Sentiments: And as it is natural for us to be pleased with and to be fond of our own Opinions, therefore, whenever we meet with what corresponds thereto, we are necessarily pleased and delighted. If what is advanced in a Sermon strongly confirms or beautifully illustrates what we believe, this will certainly draw forth the pleasurable and agreeable Affections of the Mind: But let us not conclude from hence, that we have received any spiritual Advantage, or that there has been any Thing more than the natural Effect of a natural Cause; for in all this Satisfaction there may be nothing spiritual or evangelical, even though what we are pleased with be Gospel Truth.

On the other hand, we may meet with something in a Sermon that may disgust or displease us; and this may excite answerable Affections; and these Affections we may be ready to esteem a true Zeal for the Truth, in Opposition to Error; yet, after all these Emotions of Mind, there may be nothing spiritual or savoury brought home to our Hearts, nor any Working of true Grace in the Soul. Once more; 4. The Affections being raised more or less, may very much depend upon our *natural Constitutions*. For we know that some are of a more soft, tender, and affectionate Disposition than others; and these are more easily touched and moved by what occurs in an Ordinance than others, and are more frequently melted into Tears. This therefore must not always be ascribed to a greater Degree of the Spirit's Operations, since it may be frequently accounted for from a Cause that is merely natural. Thus we see how natural Impressions, natural Sympathy, natural Inclination,

and natural Constitution, may be the sole Cause or Occasion of raising the Affections under an Ordinance. But, to prevent any discouraging Mistake, let me proceed to observe,

II. *That the Affections being thus moved in a natural Way is an Experience that is no Way evil in itself.* There is no Sin in this natural Impression, Sympathy, or Constitution; it is but right for us to be thus moved, unless these Impressions lead us off from the Gospel, or unless they are mistaken for the Operations of saving Grace. If indeed we fall into this Mistake, it may be of very dangerous Consequence, and an awful Means of making us misjudge our Frames and Experiences; being deluded by natural, instead of spiritual Impressions.

This Discourse is not designed to engage you to restrain or suppress such natural Workings of the Affections, since they are what the God of Nature has formed in us; but only to teach us how to distinguish them from what is truly spiritual and saving, that we might not mistake Nature for Grace. For which Reason, I would farther observe,

III. *That the Workings of natural Affection may be a Means, in the Hands of the Divine Spirit, to excite and promote the Exercise of spiritual Grace.* God may bless a natural Constitution or Sympathy, and make them a Means of spiritual Good. Many a Person, by the Means of his natural Affections, has been brought and kept under the Ministration of the Gospel with Delight; and this has been the first Occasion of his being begotten through the Gospel. Many have been so captivated by the Fervency or Oratory of a Gospel-Minister, as to introduce them into Privileges, which have been blest to everlasting Advantage. Remember the Case of *Ruth the Moabitess*; how the strong Affection that she, though



though bred up in Idolatry, had for her Mother-in-law *Naomi*, induced her to come into the Land of *Israel* with her Mother; and in this sweet, gradual, and insensible Way she was prevailed upon to forsake her false Gods, and to put her Trust in the Shadow of the Wings of the God of *Israel*. How beautifully did natural and spiritual Affection unite in those Words? *Ruth* i. 16. *Thy People shall be my People, and thy God my God.* And as many are caught, to their Ruin, by those Things which lay hold of their natural Affections at first; so, blessed be God, some are brought to Christ in the very same Way. Once more, it is needful to take Notice,

IV. *That the Exercise of saving Grace in Ordinances does frequently stir up our natural Affections into sensible Exercise.* Grace working strongly in the Heart has an Effect even upon the animal Frame: The Emotions of the Soul, by the Influences of the Divine Spirit, will occasion and produce a great Change in the Posture of the animal Spirits. So that the Case is mutual: Natural Affection may be so blest, as to be an Occasion of our receiving spiritual Grace and Comfort; while, on the contrary, the Exercise of saving Grace may be the Occasion of many Impressions upon our animal Frames.

But, though these Things are thus frequently linked together, and co-operate with one another, yet still there is a most important Distinction between them.

This therefore brings me to collect the Whole together, in order to give a direct Solution to the Question proposed.

What has been said will a little alter the Form of the Query. For, since natural and spiritual Affection are so connected together, the Question is not, whether our natural Affections are moved, or only spiritual Affections excited, in Ordinances; but, how shall we know whether there be any Thing more than what is

purely natural in the Motions of our Affections under divine Ordinances? There may be, and generally is, a great deal of what is natural, along with that which is spiritual and saving; and there may be nothing of what is spiritual and saving, where there is much of that which is natural. In order to distinguish Things that differ in this Case, let us put the following Queries seriously to ourselves:

I. *Whether that, which moves our Affections under an Ordinance, be what is truly spiritual and evangelical?* Sometimes we are affected by the Oratory of the Language, the Tuneableness of the Voice, or the Suitableness of the Phraseology: And, if this be all, here is certainly nothing but Nature. Sometimes we are affected by the Matter delivered, as well as by the Manner of the Delivery; but perhaps that which touches and moves us is the mere superficial or historical Part of the Discourse, without being at all moved by the interesting, important, spiritual Part of it: In this Case here is nothing but natural Sympathy; as the Daughters of *Jerusalem*, Luke xxiii. 27, 28, beheld the Sufferings of Christ with Tears of Compassion; without seeing or being impressed by the spiritual End of his Sufferings, or attending to the awful Consequences of them upon the City and its Inhabitants. But, if our Affections are wrought upon in a spiritual Manner, it is by our Regard to the evangelical Parts of the Discourse. For, so far as true Grace works, that which chiefly affects the Mind, are those Things which respect the Method of Grace, the Salvation of the Soul, the Suitableness and Excellency of *Christ*, and the like; and if we are made to feel the Power of these Things upon our Minds, so as to be impressed by the Thought of the Sinfulness of Sin, the Fulness of the Covenant, the Riches of Grace, and the Way of the Spirit in convincing,

vincing, converting, sanctifying, and comforting the Soul, here is now something more than Nature; because Nature will never teach us to regard such spiritual Things in a spiritual Way.

2. *We should inquire, not only whether our Affections are moved, but likewise whether our very Hearts and Consciences are touched.* There is a vast Difference between the *Affections* and the *Conscience* in Subjects of this Nature; and it is of the highest Importance for us to discern this Difference; because, unless the Conscience be impressed, all other Motions and Impressions are of no saving Avail. Let us therefore ask ourselves, whether we do see and feel our own Concern in the Word delivered, and whether the Thought of its respecting our own State, Frame, or Duty, be that which makes the Word pleasant or powerful to us? To familiarize this Matter to us, let us be concerned to put it home to our Souls in particular Cases. When we are hearing or thinking upon the Doctrine of the Depravity of Nature, does this affect us in an humbling Way, because we see and feel it to be our own Case? When we are attending to the Doctrine of Christ, in his Redemption, Atonement, and Righteousness, what is it that now affects our Minds? Is it merely, because we like the Doctrine, and are pleased with the Manner of handling it? or is it, because these important Truths are applied to our Consciences as the only Ground of our Hope, and the proper Matter of Consolation for our own Souls, under a real Sense of the Sinfulness and Guilt of our own Sins? When the Nature and Necessity of the Spirit's gracious and powerful Influences are displayed so as to affect us, is it only because we like the Subject, the Preacher, or his Manner? or is it because we have in our Souls at that Time a Sight and Feeling of our  
Need

Need of them ; and because we hope and desire to be made Partakers of them ? Once more ; When we hear a searching Discourse, a Discourse that plainly sets forth the Marks and Signs of a safe or dangerous State, of a good or bad Frame ; now let us observe, if this touches our Affections, and, if it does, whether the Reason is, because we are led hereby to a serious Examination of our own Hearts, State, and Frame, and have our Hopes or our Fears excited upon this Principle ? Thus, in all Cases, inquire whether that which affects us in reading or hearing the Word, be the Sight we have of our own Concern with, or Interest in, the Things declared ? If so, this is an Effect that is more than natural, because Nature of itself will never thus apply the Word to our own Hearts and Consciences.

And we may be sure, that a very great Point is gained by the Word and Ordinances of the Gospel, if they come in this Manner close to our own State or Frame. Whereas it is to be feared, that many are pleased with, and in some Way impressed by, the Word, who are never thus touched to the quick by it.

3. *Let us inquire, whether our Hearts are so impressed, as to stir up the Graces of the Spirit into Exercise in our Souls.* This can never be done, without such an Application of the Word to the Conscience, as has been just described ; and where there is this Self-Application, it seldom fails of quickening and exciting these Graces. But forasmuch as it is possible for the Word to be misapplied, so as to promote a false Hope, or beget an awful Despair, it is therefore needful to add this Question to the former. Do the Declarations of the Word humble us under a Sense of our own Meanness, Unworthiness, Guilt, and Pollution ? Are we by the Word emptied of Self, made to abhor ourselves, because of our Defilement  
and

and Abominations? Are our Desires raised after Christ, his sanctifying Grace, and his justifying Righteousness? Are we hereby stirred up to flee to Christ, to depend upon him, to seek after a Conformity to him, and to love him as one altogether lovely? In a Word, are we, by the Means of Grace, drawn off from Self, Sense, and Sin, unto Christ Jesus, for Righteousness and Strength? If there be such Motions as these produced or excited in our Hearts, in Reading, Hearing, or Prayer, it is evident, that the Graces of the Spirit are exercised. And although, under an Ordinance, where such Experiences are felt, there may be much of natural Sympathy or Impression; yet we have no Reason to question the Operations of Grace, because of the Workings of Nature; but rather should bless God, that he is pleased to turn the natural Affections into a spiritual Channel, or to make them a Means of promoting what is truly spiritual and evangelical. But, in order to prevent all Mistakes upon this Head, that we might not be deceived with counterfeit for real Graces, it will be needful to make one more Inquiry:

4. *Whether these Motions of Affection have an holy Tendency, and produce an holy Effect upon our Hearts and Lives.* These Workings of Soul under Ordinances, let them be ever so strong, ever so pleasant, or in Appearance ever so evangelical, are certainly delusive, if they have not the Stamp of Holiness upon them. If these pleasing Impressions tend to make us less watchful against Sin, or less careful to perform our Duty; if they fill us with a pleasing Imagination, that we need not be so much afraid of sinning, or need not be so diligent in Duty, because all is safe; this Turn of Thought, included in these Motions of Affection, is an infallible Mark that the Experience is delusive, detrimental, and diabolical.

lical. But, if these Workings of Sout tend to increase our Hatred of Sin, and our Watchfulness against it, and to promote our Love to Christ and true Holiness; if they leave such a Saviour behind them upon our Spirits; as imbitters Sin, and gives us a Relish for and Delight in the Ways of the Lord; if they promote our Reverence for God's Name, and our Love to his People, his Ordinances, and his Precepts; we may then be certain that they are of a spiritual and saving Nature.

Let us now collect the Whole together, and apply it by a few Remarks, for Instruction and Examination.

1. Hence learn, that *there is no Grace of the Spirit, but has its Counterfeit.* Nature can mimic a true Faith by a notional Belief, can mimic a true Hope by a presuming upon the Enjoyment of Gospel-Privileges, can mimic a true Love by a Love to the Means of Grace upon natural Principles, can mimic a true godly Sorrow by a sympathetic Weeping under an affecting Discourse, can mimic a true Joy in the Lord by a Delight in Gospel-Ordinances upon self-righteous and carnal Principles.

2. Hence learn, that *to judge of the Degree of our profiting under an Ordinance, by the Degree of Affection, is a deceitful Way of judging.* We may be most profited when least affected, and least profited when most affected. For it is not the Degree, but the Nature and Kind of the Impression, that we are to attend to, when examining whether the Word is profitable to us or no. This Thought, if properly regarded, will afford Matter for the Conviction of some, and for the Consolation of others. Art thou often delighted with, and melted into Tears under, an Ordinance? Don't immediately conclude, that thou art a thriving Christian; for most, if not the whole of this Experience may arise only from a natural Softness of Temper, or from the natural Impressions

Impressions made upon thee by the Liveliness of the Preacher, or the Beauty of his Style. On the contrary, art thou seldom affected in a lively Manner, or to any sensible Degree, under an Ordinance? Don't therefore at once discourage thyself; for, notwithstanding this Defect, thou mayest have a solid Love to Christ, Hatred of Sin, and Desire after Holiness, promoted and confirm'd: And, if this be thy Case, thou art no forgetful Hearer, but a Doer of the Word, altho' thou mayest not be so affectionate as some others are.

3. Hence learn how to put proper Questions to yourself, to know whether you are truly advantaged by any divine Ordinances. When you reflect back upon any Means of Grace you have enjoy'd, or upon any spiritual Duties you have performed, converse with your Souls in some such Manner as this: "O my Soul, thou hast been  
 " now engaged in a precious Duty, enjoying a spiritual  
 " Privilege, but how has it been with me under it?  
 " Have I been totally stupid, or have I not been; in  
 " some Measure, affected; impress'd, or delighted? If I  
 " have been absolutely unaffected in Hearing, or Prayer,  
 " &c. sure I have great Reason to be humbled and a-  
 " shamed, that my Heart has been so hard, and the  
 " Powers of my Soul so sadly wandering, or so inactive  
 " and unemploy'd, when Things of infinite Importance  
 " have been transacting. But, if I have been melted,  
 " pleased, or impress'd, have I not still some Reason to be  
 " jealous over myself, lest what has pass'd in my Soul  
 " should be what is merely natural, instead of being  
 " truly spiritual? Let me then come to a close and se-  
 " rious Examination. What was that which made me  
 " weep or rejoice, that pleased me or impress'd me? Did  
 " those glorious Truths that were delivered in Preach-  
 " ing, or those important Concerns I transacted with  
 " God

" God in Prayer, affect my Mind? Was I enabled,  
 " under the Ordinance, to apply these Things to my  
 " own Case? Was I affected with my own Interest in  
 " them, or my own Concern with them? And did these  
 " Impressions stir me up to go out of myself, and cast  
 " my Soul upon Christ for Righteousness? Were my  
 " Affections of Hope or Fear, of Joy or Sorrow, so ex-  
 " cited as to draw me off from Self and Sin, to Christ  
 " and his Grace? And had these Experiences any thing  
 " of a holy Stamp upon them, and have they left a Sa-  
 " vour behind them to make me more desirous after  
 " Christ and Holiness, and to be delivered from the  
 " Power, Pollution, and Practice of Sin? If this be my  
 " Case, I have great Cause to bless God for the Pre-  
 " sence of his Grace and the Influences of his Spirit;  
 " and so far as I find my Experience defective in these  
 " Particulars, so far I am call'd upon to humble myself  
 " before God for the Barrenness and Unfruitfulness of  
 " my Heart in these spiritual Duties."

Thus, upon the Whole, we may see how to distin-  
 guish between the Workings of natural Affection, and  
 the Exercise of spiritual Grace. But let me intreat you  
 to be earnest for the Teachings of the Holy Spirit, which  
 are absolutely necessary to apply what has been laid  
 out to your own Hearts, and to enable you to pass a  
 right Judgment for yourselves in a Case so spiritual and  
 so important.

*What*



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CASE II.

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*What Methods must a Christian in declining Circumstances, take to recover a healthful and vigorous Frame of Soul, so as to be able to maintain real and close Communion with God amidst the Hurries and Businesses of this World?*

This Question is formed from the following Letter :

" I Have, through a great Multiplicity of worldly Affairs, and a deep Engagement in them, lost that Savour and Relish for divine Things I once experienced, and am become a sad Stranger to that real Communion with God, which was heretofore my chief Joy : and I am so greatly declin'd in the Christian Life, that I can sometimes omit the Duties of secret Prayer and Meditation, and at other Times I perform them with Formality and Coldness, and yet am no ways suitably affected with my sad Defections. Indeed, sometimes I have been helped to bemoan my sad Case before God, and to plead with the blessed Jesus, the great and good Physician, to heal and help me. But alas ! Things remain with me as before ; and, if there be any Alteration in my Case, I really think it is for the worse."

 HIS is a Question, which, I doubt not, is suitable to the Cases of many of God's People in the present dark and degenerate Day, when there are so many Temptations and Difficulties to cool their Zeal, damp their Joy, and fill them with Formality and Indifferency of Spirit, in the Service

Service of the Redeemer. 'Tis not with us as it was with our Forefathers. We have not their Zeal, their Faith, their Love. We are not humble as they were, nor so watchful as they against the Temptations and Sins to which we are expos'd. We discover not that Acquaintance with the Power of Religion which they had. We walk not so close with God as they. In fine, We have the Name, the Form, but we have not so much of the Life, the Spirit, the Power of Godliness, as our Forefathers had, who are now in Glory: we are more worldly, more selfish, more proud and haughty, more careless and negligent of our Frames and our Conversation, and have, in all Respects, more of the Appearance of Almost-Christians, than they. Yet, blessed be God, this is not the Case with every Individual. There are a few who desire to honour God, by a lively Faith, a becoming Zeal, and a close and humble Walk; a few, whose Concern it is to make the greatest Advances in Grace, and to maintain daily Communion with God, amidst the various Hurries of Life. They cannot live without God. They are never easy but when they are feeling his animating and quickening Presence with them; and their Souls, in Consequence of it, warm'd, enliven'd, and breathing out Desires after him. This seems to be the Case with the Person who sent in the above Question. You know something of the Excellency of Communion with God, my dear Friend; you have found what it is to have a sweet Relish for divine Things; and now you are full of Uneasiness at the sad Loss you have sustain'd through the Hurries and Enjoyments of this Life, and desirous of having your former Experience reviv'd, and to find your Soul again in a lively, healthful, and vigorous Condition. Herein you are not singular. Many, I am persuaded, speak the  
same

same Language you do, feel the same Things, have the same Desires, and are equally at a Loss what to do. It is a Case of some Importance. May the Spirit of God enable me to answer it in such a Manner as may, through a divine Blessing, be effectual to bring your Soul and the Souls of others nearer to God, and quicken you to the Pursuit of that, which has a Tendency to promote your Growth in Grace, and make you flourishing and lively Christians! — But, before I directly answer the Question, I would make two or three Observations upon it, that may give Encouragement to Persons in such Circumstances, as well as be a Caution to them in their Pursuits of this World — And,

1. *It is a peculiar Mercy, when we find our Souls in a declining Condition, to be immediately alarmed at it, and sensible of it.* When God is about to bestow the Blessings of Salvation, he first makes the Sinner sensible of his Need of them: So, when he is about to revive his Work in the Soul that has been running astray from him, he gives him first a Sense of his *Decline*, shews him from whence he has fallen, what a Stranger he is to the Life of Religion, what Ingratitude he has been guilty of, how much he has lost of the Pleasures of the divine Life, and how much he has dishonoured that God, who called him out of Darkness into his marvellous Light. To lie asleep, as *David* did after his Adultery and Murder, is awful. Oh! Sin is of an hardening Nature. The Christian is often stupefied and benumbed with it. It shuts his Eyes, and it hardens his Heart. He has lost in some Measure his Zeal and Liveliness. His Graces are withering. His Duties are cold and formal; nay, he can oftentimes omit them. He has not that Communion with God he once enjoyed; and yet he appears to be contented. Melancholy Case! Bless

God, that this is not your Case. You appear to be sensible of the unhealthy Condition your Soul is in. You see it is not with you as in Months past. Bless God, Christians, if you are sensible of any Decays, if your Eyes are open, and your Souls are impressed with a deep Sense of the Loss of Communion with God, the Neglect of Duty, or Formality in it.

2. *We should esteem it a Mercy, if, when under a Decline, we are earnestly desirous of a Revival.* This appears to be the Case with you, my Friend. Methinks, I see you viewing former Seasons of Communion, falling down before God, and, under a deep Sense of your declining Circumstances, hear you humbly addressing him in the following Manner: — Lord, shew me what thou wouldst have me to do. I would acknowledge my many Omissions of Duty, my great Carelessness and Negligence, and would be deeply sensible of the Loss I have sustained. Oh! revive thy Work in my Soul, and let me not lie at this languishing Rate! Lord, quicken, quicken this slothful Heart, enkindle the sacred Spark afresh, and let me be all alive for thee! — How happy is it, when we are enabled to speak such Language, and find our Souls in such a Frame as this! But, on the other hand, to be careless and unconcerned, to be easy and contented in such Circumstances, is an awful Sign: that Religion is languishing in our Souls, and that there is no present Appearance of an Alteration. David, when awake, was not only sensible of the dangerous Condition he had been in, but was desirous of a Revival of the Work of God in his Soul, that he might again enjoy Communion with him, and flourish and prosper in the divine Life. Therefore he earnestly prayed, that God

## CASE II.] *Cases of Conscience.* ry

God would graciously look upon him, and return to him. *Psal. li. 7.*

3. *It is a difficult Thing to have much to do with the World, and to grow in Grace.* Through the Degeneracy of our Hearts, the *World* is become an Enemy to our Souls, an Hindrance in our Way to Heaven. Many, like the young Man, keep their Enjoyments, to the Loss of their Souls. The Christian himself, who has found the Emptiness of the *World*, and its Insufficiency to satisfy an immortal Desire, is notwithstanding ready to be too fond of it, and finds it a sad Clog and Hindrance to him at Times. He would often leave it behind him, when he goes to worship God: But it will follow him from Duty to Duty, interrupt his Communion with God, lead his Heart aside, and damp the Exercise of every Grace. How ready is the Christian to swell with Pride on account of his flourishing Enjoyments? We have need of great Grace to keep us humble in prosperous Circumstances either of Soul or Body.—Is the Christian immersed in Cares? Here he is in Danger of being filled with too much Anxiety, and of employing too much of his Time in the *World*, to the Neglect of some important Duties of Religion, in the suitable Discharge of which the divine Life is kept up in the Soul. Thus it is difficult for those, who have much to do with the *World*, to grow in Grace. I mention this, to quicken the Christian diligently to attend to those Means, that are necessary for his keeping up a lively Sense of the Things of God in his Soul; and to keep him from being discouraged, if at any Time he sees he has lost his Frame, through his many anxious Cares, or through the Temptations arising from this *World*. I doubt not but this is the Case with many. Many of you, my dear Friends, have known what it is to lose Commu-

nion with God: through the Hurries of Life; what to have your Souls out of Tune; what to be tempted to the Omission of Duties. I would bring in myself with you, and lay my Hand upon my Mouth, crying out, guilty, guilty. What then shall we do in such unpleasing Circumstances? This leads me directly to answer the Case; viz. *What Methods we must take to recover a healthful and vigorous Frame of Soul; so as to be able to maintain real and close Communion with God amidst the Hurries of Life?* — It requires a Person of great Experience to give a suitable Answer to so important a Question. Sensible of my own Weakness here, I hope I have earnestly intreated the Assistance of the Spirit of God; in Consequence of which my Mind, I trust, has been directed to the following Things, which I would now humbly suggest to you as necessary in this Case —

I. *Examine carefully into the Occasion of your Decline.* That God brings some Afflictions upon his People in a Way of Sovereignty, is plain, if we look into his Word: But, when he withholds the special Influences of his Spirit from us, the Consequences of which are Loss of Communion with him, the Withering of our Graces, and a Decline with regard to the Life of Religion in our Souls, we may immediately conclude, that we have dishonoured God in some Instance or other, and provoked him thus partly to leave us. It is necessary then to inquire into the *Occasions* of God's Withdrawment, not only for our present, but for our future Guidance. Was *Job* anxious to know why God contended with him in a Way of Affliction, and shall not we be solicitous to examine into the Reasons of our present Decline? To lose spiritual Enjoyments is much more melancholy, than to be under temporal Afflictions. Come then,  
my

my Soul; and come, my Christian Friends; and particularly come you, my dear Friend, who sent in the above Case, and are desirous of a Revival; come, and let us examine, wherein we have provoked God to withdraw. What has been the Reason of our late Coldness and Formality? How came we to lose any of our Zeal for Christ? How is it we have been led to omit spiritual Duties of Prayer, Meditation, &c.? Why is it we have not experienced the Presence of the Spirit in Ordinances, drawing our Souls after Jesus, and shedding abroad his Love in our Hearts? Oh! why is it, that it is not with us as in Months past, when we sat under the Shadow of the Lord, and his Presence filled our Souls with unspeakable Joy? We have Reason to be jealous of our wicked Hearts, and to fear that they have led us aside; and so we have grieved the Holy Spirit, and he has discovered his Displeasure — Let us make the Inquiry —

*Perhaps we have been too much elated with Pride.* Pride is a great Enemy to the divine Life. It has often provoked the Spirit to withdraw his Presence, that, being in some Measure left to ourselves, we might be humbled, and not think of ourselves beyond what we ought. 'Twas Pride that provoked God to leave *Peter*; and see how shamefully he fell. *Luke* xxii. 33, 57, 58, 59, 60. The Apostle *Paul* was like to be carried away with *Pride*, even under those high Enjoyments he was favoured with; therefore he had a *Messenger of Satan* sent to buffet him. *2 Cor.* xii. 1—7. Some are proud of the World. They grow in Riches; and their Hearts are lifted up, as if they were more amiable, or had more Interest in God, than others. Is this your Case, my Friends? Examine; have not temporal or spiritual Enjoyments lifted you up too much? Have not these vain Hearts been flattering you, as Persons of some pe-

culiar Worth? and have you not been ready to swell with the Thought, and, from such an Apprehension, to look with an unchristian Air upon others?

Again, *Perhaps you have been led by your Enjoyments to indulge a Security and Carelessness of Spirit.* Through the sad Wickedness of our Hearts, we have often been guilty here, and so have suffered an unspeakable Loss. It has often been suggested to us after spiritual Enjoyments, that our State is safe and secure; there is no depriving us of the promised Inheritance; God has given us an evident Token of his everlasting Love to our Souls, therefore we need not be so much in Duty, but may indulge a little Liberty, and enjoy a few of the Pleasures and Comforts of the present Life, and all this consistent with our Hopes of a better. These Thoughts perhaps we have too eagerly sucked in, from their having a plausible Appearance; and they have proved Poison to our Souls: For, whilst we have been taking this *innocent Liberty*, we have insensibly grown *careless and secure*, and have lost our spiritual Joy. This may be the Case also as to temporal Enjoyments. Inquire therefore, have not these led you to a *Carelessness and Security of Spirit*? God has perhaps increased your Substance, and given you every Thing richly to enjoy. You are like many of the World, you abound with Comforts; and you must be like them too, in Frame and Spirit. Oh, there is great Danger here! They apprehend themselves to be too rich to be religious; that God will pay a Deference to them on account of their Station. And has not this been a Temptation to you at Times, and so you have sunk in your Zeal, and in close Communion and Converse with God?

Again, *Perhaps you have loved this World too much.* If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not



not in him. 1 John. ii. 15. Though you may not love the World in the Sense of the Apostle; yet your Affections may be so much set upon it, as to make a jealous God withdraw the special Tokens of his Love from you. 'Tis every Way unsuitable to our Profession of Love to God to be so fond of present Things. 'Tis offering the greatest Affronts to our adorable *Emmanuel*; as if there was more Excellency in the World than in him, or as if he was not a sufficient Portion for us. O Christians, inquire; inquire, my Friend, how your Heart stands as to the World. Have you been slighting your Lord, your Husband, your best of Friends; by valuing the World too much? —

Again, *Perhaps, through a Multiplicity of Engagements, you have been tempted to neglect those Duties, in which Christians meet with God, and by which they find their Souls enlivened.* Every Duty is beautiful in its Season. There is a Time to mind the World, and a Time to attend to the Affairs of the Soul. To be diligent in our Calling is doubtless a Duty. A Christian who is careless and slothful in his worldly Affairs, is no Honour to Religion. I would not throw one Reflection upon Industry in the Pursuit of our lawful Business, but rather applaud it. But then we should remember, that the World has not a Right to all our Time. *Martha* was incumbered about making Provision for our Lord, when she ought to have been at his Feet, hearing his Doctrine: *Luke x. 38—42.* So the Christian is often in the World, when he should be in his Family, or in his Closet. Perhaps your Engagements are great; you are obliged to be much in Company. This is a Temptation to you to neglect some important Duties; Duties that have been made sweet and pleasant to your Souls. You will permit me, my dear Friends, to be quite

quite free. The Case under Consideration gives me an Opportunity for it; and the Prosperity of our Souls is a Matter of such Importance, that it requires it. — I cannot but be inclined to think that Evening Clubs, so frequent even amongst Professors, are injurious to the Christian Life. Let me here explain myself, for fear of a Mistake. I mean not, that we are to avoid all Company and Conversation in an Evening. Christian Conversation is necessary, and greatly useful. Nay, whilst we are engaged in the Affairs of this Life, it will be often necessary for a Christian to mix with those that perhaps are not so. But, when so much Time is spent in Evening Visits, Clubs, &c. as interferes with, and often sets aside, the Duties of the Family and the Closet, or leaves but little Time for these Things, no Wonder we then lose Ground in the divine Life, especially if this is too much our Practice. We should remember, that real Religion lies not in much Talking, but in a secret Converse with God, and in an Experience of his quickening Presence and Grace. Christian Conversation, indeed, has an excellent Tendency to promote this : And oh that it was more found amongst us ! But there is a great Beauty, and a good deal of Christian Skill lies in timing of Things. One Duty should not juggle out, or prevent the Discharge of another. Let me appeal to your Conscience, O Professor, and ask you a few Questions. Is it your usual Practice to spend your Evenings abroad ? What is the Consequence ? Do you find your Family in a suitable Disposition to attend to social Worship at your coming home ? Rather, are they not wearied with the Hurries of the Day, and wishing for Rest ? The Duty is oftentimes in such a Circumstance sadly curtailed, if not totally neglected. And how is it with the Closet ? That has seldom an Evening

ing Visit. You have no Time to look into your Soul, to mourn over the Sins of the Day, or to call over its Mercies; no Time for Reading or Meditation. One Neglect of this Kind makes Way for another; and the Professor can content himself with it. Oh! Christians, has this been the Case with any of you? Has this been the Case with you, my Friend? Has the Multiplicity of your Affairs, or have your Engagements, prevented your often being in your Closet? What have you lost! But, alas! you are contented, and think that none can blame you, so long as you have been in Company with some of the Friends of Jesus. Go on so, and see what will be the Consequences. You will gradually lose a Relish for the Power and Pleasures of Religion, and your Zeal will too much degenerate into Controversy. You may talk much of God; but you will walk but little with him. Pardon my Freedom, my dear Friends: I bring no Charge against you, but what I would bring against myself; and would therefore put myself upon the Enquiry, as well as you.

*Thus examine into the Occasions of your Decline*—I have given you some Instances to direct and help your Inquiries. But stop not here, but carefully examine every Thing by which you may have provoked God to withdraw his special Presence from you.

II. *When you have found the Occasions of your Decline, humble yourselves before the Lord, guard carefully against them for the future, get your Hearts sensibly affected with your Loss, and earnestly pray that the Spirit may not depart from you, but graciously return unto you.* This was the Case with David, of whom we have already spoken. When he was brought to a Sense of his Sins, how humble! He fell down prostrate before God, acknowledged and bewailed his Backslidings. He was  
jealous,

jealous, lest he should have provoked God entirely to withdraw his Presence and Spirit from him; Therefore he expostulated with him for the Return of his Favour, and that he would restore those divine Consolations, which he had before experienced, but had lately lost. *Psal.* li. 11, 12. Though we may not have been provoking God to withhold from us his special Presence by the Commission of such open and public Sins as *David*, yet have we been too closely attached to the World? Have we neglected some of the great and important Duties of the Christian Life? Have we been too proud, too careless and secure in our Frame, our Walk, and Behaviour? Have we been trifling with God? It certainly becomes us to humble ourselves before him, if we expect his Return unto us. We should draw near to him with Weeping and Lamentation; should be often endeavouring to impress our Hearts with a Sense of our Ingratitude; should be often mourning before the Lord; and should set a Mark upon those Things that have been the *Occasions of our Decline*, that we may watch against them for the future. Be often reflecting upon the Loss you have had. Consider the sickly Condition your Souls have been in, whilst the Spirit was withdrawn from you. Consider how justly God might have left you, had he been strict to mark your Backslidings: And oh! admire his infinite Patience, and earnestly pray for his Spirit to return and breathe upon your dry Bones. Let it be your daily Concern to beg of God, that he would keep your Hearts, your Affections, quicken your Souls, and not leave you to Coldness and Formality. When *Israel* were exhorted to return unto the Lord, after they had sinned, they are directed to return by Prayer, and instructed how to pray, or what to say.

*Hos.*

*Hof. xiv. 2, 3. Take with you Words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, Take away all Iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render thee the Calves of our Lips, &c.* Prayer suits all Cases, and is never to be neglected. *Is any afflicted? let him pray, James v. 13.* So, has any fallen, grieved the Spirit, and lost in some Measure that Liveliness and Vigour of Soul he once experienced? let him return to God by Prayer. Take with you Words, even those Words which God has furnished you with, and come to him; take a Promise in your Hand, and come and plead it with God for the Return of his Presence and Spirit.

III. *Often make use of your Covenant Relation to God, in pleading with him, and with your own Souls.* The Person, that sent in the Case under Consideration, does not appear to doubt of his being a Christian. The very Form, in which the Question stands, supposes it; and, upon this Supposition, I proceed to give you this necessary Direction. Some indeed may say, they cannot plead a *Covenant Relation*; for they are greatly in the dark about it, and are therefore afraid to do it. — In Answer to this, in general, *observe* — So long as you find your viewing and your pleading your *Covenant Relation* quickens you, humbles you, sets you against all Sin, and tends to fill you with Love to Jesus and his Service, look upon this as an Evidence of your Interest in the Covenant. Plead therefore, my Friends, this *Covenant Relation* to God, if you would have it better with your Souls, and would be in such a Frame as to maintain *Communion* with God.

I. *Plead it with God.* A Sense of it tends greatly to give you Faith and Fervency in Prayer, and to fill you with Hopes of the Divine Presence, and Favour. Here is a glorious Argument to make use of with God;  
Rejoice

Rejoice in it, my dear Friend, and make frequent Use of it. Often throw yourself at the Footstool of God's Throne, and address him in such Language as this — viz. — “ Lord, art I not thine? Didst thou not, O “ *Father*, chuse me from Eternity, and determine to “ bestow Salvation upon me? Didst thou not, O “ *mighty God*, undertake for me, agree to put my “ Name in the Book of Life, and, in Consequence of “ this, come and suffer and die in my stead? And “ hast thou not renewed me, O *eternal Spirit*, and set “ the broad Seal of Heaven upon my Soul? If I “ am not thine, Lord, what mean such Instances of “ Communion with thee? What means this Love to “ Jesus, these Desires after a Conformity to his Image? “ Are not these as so many Evidences of thine everlasting “ Love? And, oh! wilt thou leave me to wither “ and languish, to grow cold and formal? Wilt thou “ not come and kindle this sacred Spark afresh, and “ carry on thy Work with an almighty Efficacy? I acknowledge, Lord, I am unworthy of thy Favour: “ I have sinned, and deserve thy everlasting Displeasure. But did it not please thee, of thine infinite “ Grace, to enroll my Name amongst thy chosen Ones “ in the Volume of Eternity? And wilt thou leave me? “ Lord, it was thine own Act, thy free Act; and I “ would humbly plead it. Therefore come and visit “ my Soul, shed abroad thy Love in my Heart, pardon my Backslidings, and may I be enabled to rejoice “ in thy Covenant Love, and walk and act as one who “ has a real Interest in it.” — Thus plead with God, and follow the Example of the Psalmist, who in all Difficulties, temporal and spiritual, addressed God as his God. Oh! the Sweetness, the Happiness, that is couched in those two Words, *My God!*

2. *Often*

2. *Often make use of the same Argument, and plead this Covenant Relation with your Souls.* When you find your Souls in Danger through Sin; when you have lost your Frame, and feel a Coldness and Formality, and the Hurries of the World tempting you to a Carelessness in and a Negligence of Duty; plead with your Souls in some such Manner as this — “ O my Soul! am I  
“ acting like an Heir of Glory, to be thus incumbered;  
“ thus anxious, and thus careless? What, did the *Fa-*  
“ *ther* love me from Eternity, and give me to his Son?  
“ Did *Jesus* suffer, and die for me? And has the *Spi-*  
“ *rit* actually renewed me? In Consequence of all this,  
“ is Heaven my Portion? Am I born to Glory? Oh I  
“ and what, so cold, so formal? I will not leave thee,  
“ O my Soul, in this withering Condition. I will plead  
“ with thee the *Father's* everlasting Kindness: I will  
“ beseech thee by the tender Compassions of the *Son*  
“ *of God*, who gave himself for thee: I will press  
“ upon thee the infinite Love of the *Spirit*, who said  
“ unto thee, *Live*. I will not leave thee, till I find  
“ Things better with thee. May not the *Father* justly  
“ complain of thee? Hear, O my Soul, what he says  
“ ——— What, did I look upon thee from everlasting  
“ with infinite Kindness, and are these the Returns thou  
“ art making? Is this like one of my *chosen Vessels*?  
“ Did I pass by thousands, and look upon thee? and  
“ is this all the Sense thou hast of thy Obligations to  
“ me? ——— Hear *Jesus* gently chiding thee, O my  
“ slothful Soul; saying, What, did I love thee so as  
“ to die for thee? Was the Day of thy Redemption  
“ upon my Heart from everlasting? and shall my Cause,  
“ my Glory, lie so little upon thine? Behold my  
“ wounded Soul, see my bitter Agonies, and all to re-  
“ scue thee from everlasting Death: And wilt thou not  
“ love

“ love me more? — Hear the *Spirit* bringing in his  
 “ Charge against thee, and expostulating with thee —  
 “ Have I not, in Consequence of the *Father's* everlast-  
 “ ing Love, and the Mediator's Purchase, come and  
 “ brought thee out of Darkness into Light? What  
 “ Evidences have I given thee of *Covenant Love*?  
 “ How have I calmed thy troubled Conscience, shed  
 “ abroad a Saviour's Love in thy Heart, been a Spirit  
 “ of Grace and Supplication in thee, and a Spirit of  
 “ Adoption too? And what, art thou so ungrateful, so  
 “ cold, and secure? — Thus may God the *Father*;  
 “ *Son*, and *Holy Ghost* upbraid and chide thee, O my  
 “ Soul: And shall not this move thee? Lord, my  
 “ Heart begins to melt; it softens, it yields to so  
 “ much Love! Oh, come and do with me what thou  
 “ pleasest! May I hate Sin; may I love thee with  
 “ greater Fervency, and view every earthly Enjoyment  
 “ with Indifference, and use all to thy Glory.” — Thus  
 plead your *Covenant Relation* to God, and all the Con-  
 sequences of it, with your Souls. Do it frequently,  
 and you will find it, through the Divine Blessing, a  
 happy Means of enabling you to live above this World,  
 whilst you are in it; of humbling you for Sin; of  
 quickening you under all Decays; and of bringing you  
 into a spiritual and heavenly Frame, so as to maintain  
 some Communion with God, amidst the Hurries of Life.

IV. *If you would keep up Communion with God, whilst  
 you are engaged in the Affairs of the World, take Care  
 and watch over your Frame, your Ends, and Views.* —  
 You may lawfully follow the World with Diligence;  
 but take Care that you pursue those Measures, that are  
 necessary to keep your Hearts at a proper Distance from  
 the World, lest they should be too much carried away  
 with it, and entangled in it. Improve what Time you  
 can



can for God. Particularly take care of your Frame, before you actually enter upon your secular Affairs. Be concerned that the World does not creep into your Hearts, when you rise in the Morning. Your Morning Frames are of great Importance. Labour to throw aside the World; and do not enter upon Business, till you have earnestly sought the Presence and Blessing of God with and upon you. Consider well over, in your Closets, the Affairs of the Day, the Temptations you are like to be exposed to; and be earnest with God for his special Presence to keep you: And oh! endeavour to get your Hearts impressed with the Love of Jesus, and you will be in less Danger of being carried away by the Temptations of the Day. You read in the Life of Col. Gardiner, that that great Man had always his two Hours with God in a Morning\*. If his Regiment was to march at Four, he would be up at Two. I doubt not but that Frame he had in his Closet often went with him through the Day. I would not intimate by this, that it is the Duty of every one of you, my Friends, to spend two Hours in your Closets every Morning: But I am satisfied, that if no Care is taken to set apart some Time for God, that Person can never be in a flourishing Condition as to his Soul. Let me tell you, early Rising is not only good for the Health of the Body, but for the Health of the Soul too, provided some Time is spent with God, and communing with our own Hearts. O my Friends, strive, wrestle with God in your Morning-Hours for his Presence in the Day, and labour to get Love to Jesus inkindled in your Breasts, before you go out of your Closets: And watch over your Frame in the Day. Exa-

\* Col. Gardiner's Life, Page 60.

mine your Ends and Views, the Principles and Springs from whence you act. Watch over your deceitful Hearts. Walk as in the Presence of God. In fine, let the Glory of Christ lie near your Hearts, and be afraid of any Thing that may dishonour God, and provoke his Spirit to withdraw from you. — Thus, in endeavouring to cultivate a spiritual Frame and Temper, and to walk with Humility and Circumspection, you will give Evidence of your being Christians indeed; may expect the Presence of God with you; and I doubt not but, through his divine Blessing, you will find your Souls in a thriving Condition. I would now close these few Hints with two Remarks —

1. *Hence we find, that it is not an easy Thing to be a flourishing Christian.* We must live much in the Exercise of Faith; we must be much upon our Guard against Sin; we must be much in our Closets, seeking God by Prayer, examining ourselves, and keeping a strict Watch over our Hearts, lest they should deceive us. A careless Christian cannot be a flourishing one. If you would grow up like *tall Cedars*, and flourish as *Trees of Righteousness*, you must not be cold and lifeless, careless as to your Frames and Conversation. Like Centinels, you must be ever upon your Watch; like Persons running a Race, you must be pressing towards the Mark with all your Might; and like Soldiers, you must be prepared for the Battle, and enter the Field with your Armour on, that you may get daily Advantages over your spiritual Enemies, and may go from Strength to Strength, from one Degree of Grace unto another. To be lively Christians, such as glorify God in every Circumstance of Life, requires Grace to be much in Exercise, much of the Presence of God, and constant Supplies out of our Redeemer's inexhaustible Fulness.

2. *We*

2. *We should be each concerned to inquire how it is with our Souls, and, if we are upon the Decline, to attend unto the Directions that have been given.* Put off a Matter of such vast Importance no longer ; but examine whether you are Christians indeed, or not, and in what Circumstances, whether thriving, or declining : And, if you are upon the Decline, let me intreat you to consider what has been said upon this Subject, and think it high Time to awake out of Sleep. Oh ! if you have any Concern for the Honour of Christ, any Concern for the Peace and Welfare of your precious Souls, labour to have Things better with you. Let your Loins be girt, and your Lights burning : And may none of us be under the least Alarm, when Death approaches, but then, through Grace, be enabled to say, *We have fought the good Fight ; we have finished our Course ; we have kept the Faith.* Henceforth there is laid up for us a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give us at that Day, and not to us only, but also to all those that love his Appearing.

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 CASE III.
 

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*A serious Person, who scruples to comply with the usual Practice of playing at Cards, desires to know, whether these Scruples arise from a needless Tendernefs of Conscience, or from the faithful Monitions of the Spirit of God?*

The above Question is grounded upon, and extracted from, the following Epistle :

“ Reverend Sir,

“ I Humbly take Liberty to recommend to your Consideration a Subject, which has been of great Concern to my Mind. In Time past I had a great Liking to, and frequently practised the Game of Cards without Remorse, as most young People, I believe, do. But, since I have tasted that the Lord is gracious (which I hope is my happy Case) I directly laid aside the general Practice of it, as what I apprehend unbecoming the Christian Character. I have withstood frequent Temptations offered for a Compliance ; but, once being in Company warm for the Game, on their Solicitation I complied, but not without sharp Reproofs of Conscience. On which I secretly purposed to have no more to do therewith, and have hitherto kept my Resolution. Whether my Refusals are needless Scruples of Conscience, or faithful Monitions from God, is my Query. And, as the Season is coming on, in which the Game of Cards is commonly practised, and I may possibly  
“ fall

“ fall in the Way of Temptation hereto, I am desirous  
 “ to know, if by Compliance I shall sin against God, and  
 “ (if so) wherein the Evil thereof particularly consists.”

*I am, Sir,*

*Yours, &c.*

“ P. S. I leave it to your Judgment to frame a Question from these Thoughts suitable to the Occasion.”



Such a conscientious Spirit runs through the above Epistle, I think it may speak the Language of many Hearts, and therefore the more readily address myself to the Consideration of the Subject.

The serious Request contained in the foregoing Letter cannot be answered without entering into the Merits of the Cause; for there is no other Way of knowing whether the Scruples in our Minds, as to any particular Practice, be needless or just, but by applying to the Divine Word, as the Rule of Duty, to see what we can gather from thence by just Consequence concerning the Point. So far, therefore, as my Judgment reaches, I would endeavour seriously and faithfully to recommend myself to every Man's Conscience in the Sight of God.

Let me first speak a few Things, which agree to the Game of Cards along with other Diversions in common; and then consider what is peculiar to this Game, and others of a similar Kind; and so by Degrees shew you wherein and how far it is lawful or unlawful. And,

1. This Diversion, with every other, is certainly evil, *whensoever it is attended with these Circumstances, that are detrimental and disgraceful; if it be practised with wicked Company; if it is pursued at unreasonable Hours; if it*

infringes upon the regular Duties, civil or religious, of the Family; if it puts by, or drives into a Corner, the secret Duties of the Closet; if it occasions the laying of high Stakes, or stirs up the Corruptions of Anger, Envy, Revenge, or lays a Foundation for Swearing, Quarrels, and Confusions. And it is still more peculiarly abominable, whenever Persons Hearts are so hardened by the Deceitfulness of Sin, as to presume upon the Practice on the *Lord's Day*. Those who are acquainted with this Game, and indulge a free Use of it, cannot but be sensible, that it is *very, very* often attended with such abominable Circumstances: And as it is for the most Part attended with, or productive of, these Evils, therefore every one that has any Sense of Religion, and any Conscience towards God, should be very wary and cautious how he ventures upon it.

2. This Diversion, with every other, is certainly evil, *so far as it is a Disgrace and Dishonour to the Profession of Religion*. For a Professor to give himself up to *any* Diversion immoderately, is a Reproach to him. But for a Professor of Christianity to be a professed *Card-player*, is a Brand, an Infamy. When any of them are known to be Followers of this Practice, their Characters are sunk in the Esteem of all truly serious Christians and Gospel-Churches; and this Report spread concerning them, or this Practice seen amongst them, raises their Credit only among the loose, gay, and vain Part of the World, and exceedingly hardens the Hearts of those, who have not set God before them.

And that this is a reproachful Diversion, is practically and publicly acknowledged by the Form of the Indentures, whereby Youths are bound Apprentices; for in these Indentures they are bound to abstain from *Cards and Dice*, and other unlawful Games. And doubtless

doubtless this Form was established in those Indentures, under a Conviction that these Diversions are peculiarly insinuating to Youth.

If therefore Professors have any conscientious Regard for their Reputation as Christians, they are bound from this Principle to abstain from the disreputable Practice.

3. This Diversion, with every other, is certainly evil, *so far as it is insinuating in its own Nature.* Now it is very evident from Matter of Fact, that this Game has something peculiarly bewitching and intangling in it. How strongly does it captivate the Affections, how strangely does it draw away the Heart, and how powerful is its Efficacy to fill the Mind with Vanity! to such a Degree, that a Person must be extremely upon his Guard to escape receiving an unspeakable Prejudice to his Soul. This Diversion therefore must be certainly unlawful, when it bewitches the Mind, and produces Vanity and Carnality of Affection. Besides, it is known, that this Game has some such pernicious Pleasure in it, as actually enamours the Affections, and makes Persons to be extremely fond of it, and set upon it, as if it was a Matter of the highest Importance to have Opportunities for it, and to be indulged in it. And, generally speaking, so efficacious is this Influence upon the Mind, that all Arguments and Persuasions, all Warnings, nay, and the very Experience of Disadvantages arising from it, prove altogether too weak to detach the Mind from it. Many Persons are so fond of it, that they will forego almost every Thing, rather than be debarred from the insatiable Pleasure. With what unaccountable Eagerness do some pursue it; how are they vexed and grieved at Heart, when disappointed of a Game; and what Resentment rises in their Minds

against those, who are so faithful as to reprove or debar them? And that Person must be accounted a Precisian, an Enthusiast, an Enemy to Pleasure, who attempts to speak a Word against it. Whenever Matters are run to such a Length as this, or to any Thing like it, it is an Evidence that the Gamesters are absolutely intoxicated with carnal Pleasure.

4. This Diversion, with every other, must certainly be evil, *when it unfit the Soul for spiritual Duties*. It is readily granted, that some Diversions are certainly lawful; and it is as readily allowed, that some Diversion is really necessary. But then it is only so far, as it is suited to unbend the Mind for a Season from severer Thought, or to relax the Body to render it the more capable to perform necessary Duty. Diversion is graciously allowed and designed to fit the Body and Mind for spiritual and natural Duties. But, surely a *gracious Person* must acknowledge the following Maxim to be just: That, whatsoever Diversions do actually unfit the Frame and Spirit of the Mind for devotional Exercises, they so far prove themselves to be hurtful and criminal. And therefore every Person, that has any Regard for the Power of Godliness in his own Soul, must judge and condemn himself as guilty before God, whenever he engages in such Diversions, or to such a Degree, as to unfit his Soul for Communion with God. And, if every Professor did seriously attend to this Rule, and examine himself by this Test, I doubt not but he would soon be obliged to decline this Practice from his own Experience. Give me leave here to put one Question to your Consciences; a Question that needs to be put seriously to you, and by you to yourselves:

*Whether, after a Game at Cards, you do not actually find yourselves hereby unfitted for spiritual Devotion? And*



I strongly suspect, that if every one of you (who know what Communion with God means) would be faithful to yourselves, you would, all of you, find by sad Experience, that this Game is an absolute Enemy to vital Religion.

Having brought this Subject down thus into Experience itself, I will beg leave to offer the following Considerations to your Thoughts.

Since this Game is found to be so peculiarly attended with many Evils, to be so peculiarly dishonourable and infatuating, and to be in Fact such an Enemy to vital Godliness, what can be the Reason hereof? Is there not some Ground to suspect that it is *evil in itself*? If it be *not* so, how comes it to pass, that such Evils should necessarily cleave to it, or be necessarily produced by it? But, if it be *unlawful*, wherein does the particular Evil of it consist? Far would I be from exaggerating Matters of any Kind unjustly; though I am apprehensive that many, who may see these Lines, will imagine, that an Attempt to prove this Game to be evil *in itself* must be owing to an Over-nicety, Preciseness, or Scrupulosity of Conscience. But let me crave your Patience a little, while I attempt to lay forth my Thoughts upon this Head with all Freedom and Plainness.

The whole I have to say upon this Subject is founded upon a plain, but too much neglected Passage of sacred Writ: *Prov. xvi. 33. The Lot is cast into the Lap; but the whole Disposing thereof is of the LORD; i. e.* whenever a Lot is cast, the intire Decision or Determination of it is from JEHOVAH himself. He claims it as his sole Prerogative. This Proverb will appear to be true concerning all Sorts of Lots, whether *civil* or *religious*, wheresoever, howsoever, or whatsoever they may be cast. For, in all Cases whatsoever, when a

Lot is cast, and cast fairly, an Event is thereby rendered casual and uncertain; and it is not within the Reach of human Skill or Power to ascertain, foresee, or determine the Event: And, if it be beyond human Contrivance or Art to decide the Affair, to whom then does it belong, or whose Prerogative is it? Whoever therefore believes the universal Providence of God, must of Necessity acknowledge, that *all Events* universally are under the Divine Direction, more especially those that are *casual*. And, if God is to be owned in those Events that come upon us daily, unforeseen, unsuspected, and undesign'd by any Creature; surely Divine Providence ought to be *still more especially* regarded by us, whensoever we *voluntarily* render an Event uncertain and casual. We must therefore conclude from the above plain Text, and the Reasoning upon it, that we ought in no Case design'dly to render an Event casual with Respect to us, without some real Dependence upon, and Submission to Divine Providence. With which Frame of Spirit Lots may be cast or established upon proper Occasions without any Harm or Crime\*: And, without some such Frame of Mind in casting or receiving a Lot, we are really defective in our Regard to JEHOVAH as a God of Providence, even supposing the Occasion of the Lot to be proper and justifiable. But, if we venture to cast a Lot upon trivial Occasions, such Occasions as it would be Pro-

\* In Cases of Necessity and Importance, where we cannot, without falling into destructive Contentions, decide a Point in Question, the Lord graciously permits us to refer the Decision of the Affair to himself by Lot, provided we do it with a proper Eye to him, as the grand Arbitrer and Disposer. *Prov. xviii. 18. The Lot causeth Contentions to cease, and parteth between the Mighty.*

phaneness to address JEHOVAH in, we are then guilty of trifling with that, which ought to be treated with a serious Regard to the LORD, as the supreme Decider of all Events; and especially of those, whose Decision we *designedly* put out of our own Reach.

It may perhaps here be readily asked, What Reference has all this Reasoning to the present Subject? or how can this be applied to the Games of Cards and Dice? Let me then briefly state this Affair to you, with a View to the Diversion in Question,

I confess, that in this Game much of the Success depends upon the Skill and Attention of a Person who engages in it; for a skilful Player can sometimes make a greater Advantage of a *bad* Hand, than others can of a *good* Hand. But still, whether a Person should have a good or bad Hand, depends intirely upon the cutting, shuffling, and dealing out of the Cards; and this is a very important Circumstance in the Game. I shall put the Affair of a Lot in the present Case only upon this Issue. He that shuffles, or cuts and deals out the Cards, either does it *fairly* or *unfairly*. If it be done *unfairly*, then here is Cheating, Knavery, Fraud, and Dishonesty practised in the Game. But, if he does it *fairly*, it is done in such a Manner, that no Person can foresee which Side should have the Advantage: So then here is an Event *designedly* put into a properly casual or uncertain State; and this is, this can be, no other than the very Act of casting a Lot. So that we are necessarily reduced to this Dilemma, that either a Lot is cast, or the Game is conducted in a cheating, dishonest Way. Therefore, if Justice takes Place in the Game, here is an Event, an Event of considerable Consequence in the Play, *designedly* put out of the Decision of human Skill, Forethought, or Contrivance; and so the Decision of  
this

this Event must necessarily be referred elsewhere, to some invifible Power.

Can it then be improper or unnecessary to ask, whether the Decifion is referred? Is it to *God*, to the *Devil*, or to *Chance and Fortune*? If the Decifion be referred to *God* himfelf, as a God of Providence, this can be efteemed no lefs than *Prophanenefs*: And we are afured, that *God will not account him guiltlefs, that taketh his Name in vain*. And can we, with any Serioufnefs or Decency, at a Game of Cards, fay in our Hearts, LORD, *give a perfect equitable Lot*? I know we cannot; you know we cannot. Such Language of Heart or Action can never be efteemed decent in Diverfion: And thofe, who have any Serioufnefs in their Spirits, are far from the Thought, and cannot bear the Reflection in their own Confcienfes.

I ask then further, if the Decifion be not referred to the LORD, is it to the *Devil*? No, by no Means, you will fay. This you deteft as much as the former, as it has a Species of *Witchcraft* in it. It only then remains that the Reference is made to *Chance*, or *Nothing*. To fay that it is referred to *Nothing*, is to fay that is *not referred at all*; which is contrary to Matter of Fact; becaufe the Event is actually and defignedly referred away from yourfelves, and from all human Skill and Contrivance. And therefore it muft be referred to *Luck, Chance, or Fortune*. This Thought is more tolerable than the former: And it is extremely evident that the Reference is made *hither*, from the univerfal Language which obtains in this Diverfion; in which nothing is more common than to talk about *Luck, Chance, and Fortune*. But remember then, if the Reference be made to *Chance*, what is this but fubftituting, practically fubftituting, *Fortune* in the room of Divine Providence,

Providence? which is a Species of *Heathenism* or *Idolatry*.

It may be said indeed, in order to satisfy or sooth the Conscience, that you have no Thought or Design in shuffling the Cards to make an Appeal or Reference any whither, neither to *God*, the *Devil*, nor *Chance*; and therefore you cannot be chargeable with either of these suggested and supposed Evils. But it is easy to reply, that though your remote Intention be only to divert yourselves, and to conduct the Game fairly, yet a more immediate Design professedly intervenes; namely, it is your actual Intention, if you are honest and fair, to put an Event out of your own Reach, and out of the Reach of your Partner and Company, in order for you to divert yourselves by it and upon it. And if you do designedly and professedly refer the Event away from the Determination of all human Skill and Forethought, it highly becomes you, who cast this Lot, seriously to inquire whither you refer it then; remembering at the same Time, that whatever your Thought be, or whether you have any Thought about it or no, it is still an *universal Truth*, that when the Lot is cast into the Lap, the whole Disposal of it is of the LORD. Say not, O Professor, that the Providence of God has nothing to do with such trifling Concerns: For, whether we will or no, the above-quoted Text is, and must be of universal Extent. Are these Concerns too trivial for Divine Providence? when *not a Sparrow falls to the Ground without our Father, and the very Hairs of our Heads are all numbered*.

I am sorry that I am obliged to inculcate and enforce such plain and universal Truths, because they are so evidently infringed upon even by Professors themselves, through their being habitually ignorant of the Evil included

cluded in Chance-Diversions. And surely those Amusements can scarcely be called harmless, whose Innocency can be no otherwise supported, than by excluding, contracting, or abridging the Providence of God.

But I have another serious Thought to offer to your Consideration, which I cannot but conceive must have some Weight in it to a serious Mind.

You know in yourselves, that, whensoever this Lot is cast in the Diversion, you are more or less concerned about, or concerned with, the Event in your Minds: Your Affections are more or less at work, in a Way of Expectation and Hope, to see what Advantages Chance will give you, or deprive you of, in the Game. And the Difference is not very great, if you play but for a Trifle, or even for nothing: For every Person is in some Degree solicitous and desirous to have the Advantage of a good Hand, either from a Principle of *Interest* or *Honour*. For, if you are totally indifferent about the Event of the Game, and about having the Advantage in it, you actually lose all Pleasure and Amusement in the Diversion. 'Tis this Hope and Concern, that is the *Spring* of all the Pleasure attending the Diversion to you; and it is this that keeps your Attention to it. Accordingly there is in some Degree a Hope of having a good Hand, or a Fear of having a bad Hand; and a certain Joy and Pleasure, if the *former* falls to your Lot, and a certain Sorrow or Grief if the latter comes to your Share, by the shuffling and dealing out of the Cards.

Let me then intreat you seriously to reflect what these Affections of the Mind are excited by, what they are built upon, what is their Object and their Foundation? Is it not *Chance*, *Luck*, or *Fortune*? If not, what else can be the Ground of these Motions and Affections,  
from

from whence the primary Pleasure of the Amusement springs? Certainly you agree to refer the Decision of the Event (which raises these internal Motions, these Hopes, Fears, or Dependencies) away from all the Creatures, from all human Skill and Power, unto *Chance* or *Fortune*: And, if so, is not this an *experimental*, as well as a *constructive* Substitution of Fortune in the room of Providence? See whether this is not the true State of the Case, whenever your Minds are in any Measure agitated with Hopes or Fears, Pleasure or Sorrow, about the Goodness or Badness of the Hand. And if this be, or so far as it is, the Spring of your Attention to, and Pleasure in the Game, what Name shall we give to this Sort of Pleasure? And can we wonder that it should be so peculiarly-insnaring and intoxicating, as we generally find it to be?

But, if what has been said in a Way of reasoning upon the Nature of a Lot, and the necessary Workings of the Mind upon the Event decided thereby, does not convey any Conviction, I would try one more Method; and that is by making a plain and close Appeal to the Hearts and Consciences of those, that have any thing of the Fear of God before their Eyes, concerning the Workings of their Minds, the Sentiments of their Hearts, and the Words of their Lips, in the Practice of these Amusements.

'Tis possible, you may think there is very little in all this Argumentation concerning the Nature and Design of a Lot. Be it so then: But let us next see what are the unavoidable Consequences and Effects of thus trifling with Providence under the feigned Name of Luck and Fortune: For frequently the Innocency or Evil of any Thing is best seen in the immediate and universal Fruits and Effects thereof.

Now

Now I will venture to affirm that this very Practice generally, and as it were necessarily, produces these Effects upon Professors: 1. Heathenish Sentiments; 2. Heathenish Language; 3. Heathenish Affections: All which together often introduce, 4. Heathenish Practices. You may well be startled at the very Proposal of these Particulars. However, all that I desire is, that you would give them that Weight, which upon proper Examination they appear to have in Fact upon yourselves and your Experience.

1. *Heathenish Sentiments* appear to be the unavoidable Consequence of this Practice. It actually contracts your Notions of Divine Providence. It makes you ready to imagine, that God leaves some Events to Chance or Fortune. And indeed you dare not be clear, consistent, and properly extensive in your Sentiments concerning the divine Determination of casual Events, without making some Breach upon, or causing some Suspensions in, your Consciences concerning this Practice, wherein you professedly agree to refer the Determination of an Event, wherewith you are concerned, away from yourselves, you know not *whither*, or at least dare not think whether it is in Fact referred according to the true Doctrine of Providence.

This Diversion naturally leads you into an Opinion, that Chance presides over and rules the Game; that Fortune sometimes takes one Side, and sometimes another, in a Sort of arbitrary Way. It naturally tends to make you think that some Persons are lucky and fortunate, while others are unlucky and unfortunate. To which we may add, that there is a Multitude of heathenish Notions arising from, or making their Way into, your Minds: Such as, that Fortune smiles upon some, and frowns upon others; that, if the Cards are



shuffled in some other Manner, or if we change our Places, &c. this will turn the Course of Chance another Way. Let me ask you freely, whether you do not find that such Imaginations gradually obtain some Place in your Minds? And surely these Conceptions are not only idle, but heathenish and foolish in the highest Degree, and have more Evil and Infection in them than we may at first View be ready to allow. I am indeed very sensible, that no judicious, conscientious Christian can in his sober Thoughts embrace such Opinions: But yet a frequent Practice of these Games will unavoidably leave the Infection of them upon the Imagination; and that sometimes to such a Degree, that a Person actually desires to divert himself this Way, because of the Amusement and Entertainment he finds in seeing (as he thinks) how Fortune shifts Sides, desiring and hoping that it may turn about in his own Favour. All this will be farther confirmed by observing,

2. That *Heathenish Language* appears to be the unavoidable Consequence of this Practice. How constantly do we hear the Terms, *Luck, Chance, Fortune*, in the Process of this Game? How freely do the Gamesters talk of *lucky Persons, lucky Hands*, and *fortunate or unfortunate Places*? This every one knows is the very Dialect of the Card-Table. And let me ask thee, O Professor, whether such Expressions as these are fit for the Lips of a Christian? One would rather think that the very Sound of them must be offensive to his Ears, and drive him away from the Diversion, when he knows that the whole of this Phraseology is expressive of Sentiments directly opposite to the Christian Doctrine of Divine Providence. Yea, farther,

3. *Heathenish Affections* are the unavoidable Consequence of this Diversion. From hence naturally arise  
such

such Motions of the Soul as these ; a wishing that Fortune may favour us, a Hope that it will, and a real Dependence upon it for our Success in the Play ; a grieving and being uneasy at our Fortune, if we be particularly unlucky, an envying another whom Fortune seems to favour more than us ; a being pleased and rejoiced when a good Hand comes to our Share, and then in our Minds insulting over those that are not so happy and prosperous in that Respect. And as all Persons know that the Success of the Game very much depends upon Chance ; therefore, so far as a Person's Heart is concerned with the Event, by reason of his Interest or Honour being involved in it, so far these various Affections of the Soul are unavoidably moved. So that here is a vast Variety of Passions fixed upon Chance, and excited by it. The Desire is towards it ; the Dependence is upon it ; and, when it frowns, there is either a Submission to it, or a Fretting at it, or envying and grieving at the Fortunateness of another. And it cannot but be acknowledged, that these Affections, thus excited frequently work with great Strength, and visibly discover themselves in the Countenance, Words, and Actions. Now some of these Affections are evil in themselves ; such as Fretfulness and Envy. They all of them are generally agitated to an immoderate Degree : And even those Affections, such as Hope, Fear, Submission, Dependence, and Joy, which are lawful in themselves, become heathenish and criminal so far, as they have Fortune for their Object and Motive.

And were we to try at giving another Turn to our Account of these Affections, and suppose them to be excited not by Chance, but by the View of the Divine Decision ; this would only make the Matter worse, by introducing apparent Prophaneness. For certainly you  
would

would not choose to call the Pleasure in having a good Hand Thankfulness to God, nor this Submission, if you have a bad Hand, a Submission to the Divine Providence; any more than you would choose to call any Degree of Fretfulness or Envy in the Game a fretting at the Divine Disposal, or envying another the Advantage God has given him\*.

Look therefore into your own Experiences under such Diversions, and see how far these Sentiments, this Language, and these Motions of Heart are chargeable upon you; and then you will be obliged to allow that the Game is very pernicious and intoxicating to you, whether you will grant the Justness of the foregoing Reasonings upon the Nature of a Lot, or no: Though one can scarcely think, that a Person, who finds and observes these heathenish Effects upon him, should be at any Loss to judge from whence they proceed; since the very Nature of these evil Experiences, and the very Nature of the Evil that is in them, proclaim, that they are a practical and experimental Substitution of *Fortune* in the room of *Providence*. Upon these Principles and Observations, we need not wonder, if a Fondness for and a Pursuit of this Diversion produce,

4. *Heathenish Practices and Effects.* It naturally tends to make Persons lose their Reverence for God in the common Affairs of Life, to make them forget that casual Events are under the Disposal of the great Governor of

\* In other Diversions, wherein the Success *entirely* depends upon the Exertion of our own Skill or Strength, there is no such Snare; because there in our Hopes or Fears, &c. are founded upon a Reality, and may therefore be very innocent. But in Chance-Games a Person is in the utmost Danger of letting his Affections loose upon *that*, which, if it be any Thing, is, and can be, no other than the Divine Providence, which certainly ought not to be thus played and trifled with.

the Universe, by ascribing them to Chance, without looking any higher. It tends to draw off the Heart from God, and to discompose the Spirit for devotional Exercises. It fills the Mind with such Imaginations, Sentiments, Wishes, Hopes, and Dependencies, as are unsuitable to a serious Christian, destructive to the Power of Godliness, and are a never-failing Hindrance to the Spirit of Devotion. It generally precludes the Worship of God in the Family and Closet, or drives it into a Corner. And as a Relish for this Diversion increases, so, in Proportion, a Regard to and a Relish for spiritual vital Religion declines; and those that are the most attached to it, are such as live without God in the World.

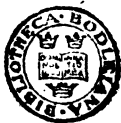
All this may be turned into an Address to all those, that occupy themselves in these Diversions. Are there any of you, whose Consciences are struck by these Representations and Appeals? How deeply ought you to be humbled before the LORD, that you have walked in the Counsel of the Ungodly, have stood in the Way of Sinners, and have even sat in the Seat of the Scorners? Beg of God the Holy Spirit to fasten the Conviction in your Hearts, as a Nail in a sure Place, that you may be never more polluted with these Corruptions.

But are there any of you, who make a Profession of Religion, who still are found in, and are fond of these Practices? Give me Leave to expostulate Matters with you: What is there in this Diversion, that is so relishable and enchanting to you? Is the Pleasure so great, or have you such a Regard for your *Honour* or *Interest* at a Game of Cards, as to bring them into Competition with your Reputation as Christians, or the Interest of your precious Souls?

I would

I would fain hope, that many of you dare not pursue this Game with those Circumstances of Evil, that most do, by attending to it at unseasonable Hours, with high Stakes, in public or vain and irreligious Company, &c. If any of you are going on in this Way, I must proclaim, there is not the Fear of God before your Eyes; and your Profession of Religion is no other than a Snare to your own Souls, and a Means of hardening the Hearts of others.

But are there not some, nay many of you, that make no Scruple of this Game *occasionally*? You satisfy your Minds with this Thought, that you practise it but seldom, and that at convenient Times and in proper Company, and can therefore see no Harm in it, or find any bad Effects from it. Come, let us seriously inquire into this Matter. Though you may avoid Swearing, Quarrelling, bad Society, and unseasonable Hours in this Game, does it follow, that it is therefore *harmless* to you? Have you never observed how unfit your Frames have been for spiritual Devotion after it? Have you never observed it to be a Means of contracting or setting aside your Family and Closet Duties? Have you never observed what ill Effects this occasional Practice has upon your Children and Servants? To come closer, can you avoid its polluting your own Minds with unchristian Imaginations, or its defiling your Lips with a Language contrary to the Language of *Canaan*? For my Part, I could never see that, when Christians met together upon this Amusement, they could avoid this heathenish Phraseology, or these heathenish Perturbations of Mind in the Game, more than others. And although it is too natural for you to make light of these Things, yet I must affirm, that these Workings of Affection, and these Forms of Language, you are led into



hereby, are far from being trivial Crimes. I know indeed, that Things of this Nature appear very trifling and inconsiderable to those who do not pay a spiritual Regard to the first Risings of the Mind, or to the idle Words they speak. But surely, if you have any considerable Degree of the Fear of God before your Eyes, and of the Love of Christ in your Hearts, you will think it your indispensable Duty to avoid the hearing of that, which is so heathenish, and to keep yourselves from being drawn into those Sentiments and Affections, which such Language expresses. These Things have undoubtedly in them a Species of *Enthusiasm* and *Infatuation*, as hereby the Thoughts, the Affections, and Language, are conversant about a *Non-entity* (for such is *Chance* and *Fortune*, separate from the Providence of God): And what can be more irrational, what can debase human Nature more, than for it to have its Hopes, Desires, and Dependencies founded and fixed upon what is really nothing? And according to the scriptural and rational Account of what you are conversant with in these Games, you have the highest Reason to suspect yourselves to be guilty of, or upon the very Margin of, *Prophaneness* and *Idolatry*.

I must now commit the whole to your serious Consideration, and to the Divine Blessing, desiring you to remember, that, as it is a Game so very dishonourable to Professors, so very detrimental in its Tendency, and so very insatuating in its Influence, its Lawfulness in itself must be justly suspected. It must be the safest Way to abstain from it entirely; and cannot but be hazardous to practise it upon any Occasion. If you would keep your Consciences clear, and abstain from all Appearance of Evil, it is highly necessary you should keep at a Distance from this Diversion, lest your Ears should  
be

be defiled with heathenish Sounds, your Lips with heathenish Language, your Minds with heathenish Sentiments, and your Hearts with heathenish Affections. And do not think it an easy Matter to avoid these Evils, while you fall into the Practice: For, if you truly attend to and examine your own Hearts, you will find it really impossible to indulge the Game, and avoid the Snare of it.

As for you, who go on voluntarily and presumptuously in this Diversion, making it your constant Practice and your great Delight, to the Neglect or Contempt of Family or Closet Religion; it is very evident, that you have not the Fear of God before your Eyes. And, however easy your Consciences may be in the midst of these Pursuits, yet take this solemn Hint along with you, that for every evil Thought, and for every idle Word, you must give an Account in the Day of Judgment.

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### CASE IV.

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*How may a Person judge when a Promise or Threatning comes from God, or is brought by Satan, to the Soul?*

This Question you will find contained in the following Letter :

*Reverend Sir,*

“ I AM a Person who have for some Years been a  
 “ professed Follower of *Jesus*, have had a Place in  
 “ his House, enjoyed great Privileges, and have had  
 “ Advantages above many, sitting under a sound, faith-  
 “ ful, and tender Minister. But, under these Means  
 “ of Fruitfulness, I, alas ! seem barren and unprofita-  
 “ ble, and am afraid I go backward in Religion, and  
 “ make Advances in Sin : And what is worst, my Heart  
 “ is so hard, that I do not mourn over these Declen-  
 “ sions as I ought ; and therefore fear I am not proper-  
 “ ly affected with them. No sooner does a Tempta-  
 “ tion offer, but I fall in with it : So that I often think,  
 “ whether my refraining from gross Immoralities is  
 “ not more for Want of Temptations, than from a  
 “ real Hatred of them, and Love to Holiness. And yet  
 “ I hope I sincerely strive, and pray, and resolve against  
 “ Sin in Christ’s Strength, being convinced that I have  
 “ none sufficient of my own. But can I sincerely do  
 “ this, and fall so frequently ? I attend on Gospel-Or-  
 “ dinances ; but, I fear, to little Purpose, being cold and  
 “ lifeless under all. I hear the Love of *Jesus* sweetly  
 “ displayed ; but this icy frozen Heart is not melted,  
 “ these languid and lifeless Affections not raised to, nor  
 “ fixed



“ fixed upon the dear Redeemer. I cannot call him;  
“ *my Redeemer*, lest I should be deceiving my own  
“ Soul; and yet I dare not say I have no Part in him,  
“ lest I should be ungrateful, and deny his Work. Thus  
“ I am in a Strait: But this I must say, that I desire to  
“ call the glorious Saviour, *my Lord* and *my God*. Ano-  
“ ther Thing that appears discouraging is this — In an  
“ Answer to a Question some Time since, you proved  
“ that Satan did often produce Passages of Scripture to  
“ terrify the trembling Christian. Now, this being the  
“ Case, may he not transform himself into an Angel  
“ of Light, bring Promises to our Minds, and so de-  
“ ceive us? If so, how can a poor Creature judge when  
“ a Promise or a Threatning comes from God, or  
“ from Satan; especially, when sometimes Promises  
“ have seemed to be sweetly, seasonably, and power-  
“ fully set home upon the Soul, and afterwards aw-  
“ ful Threatnings have appeared to come with equal  
“ Strength? I beg you will take these Things into  
“ your Consideration, if you think them of sufficient  
“ Importance: And may the eternal Spirit, whose  
“ Work it is, direct you to a suitable Answer, that I  
“ may be capable of judging in some Measure of my  
“ Condition; whether I am but a painted Hypocrite,  
“ or a real, though, I am sure, then, a poor unworthy  
“ Believer! Oh, that I could experience this made  
“ good to my Soul! *They that wait on the Lord, shall re-  
“ new their Strength*. Now God is faithful, and the Pro-  
“ mise is absolute; they *shall*, &c. Surely then, if I  
“ waited properly on the Lord, or was within the Bond  
“ of the everlasting Covenant, this would be my Case.  
“ I think, if I am more lifeless at one Time than ano-  
“ ther, it is at the Lord's Supper: So that I sometimes  
“ think, I should sin less in neglecting, than in attend-  
“ ing

“ing in such an unbecoming Frame, as I almost constantly do. Oh hard rebellious Heart! stupid and ungrateful Creature! surely, could you see my Vileness, you would never judge favourably of my State.”



HIS Case consists of a Variety of Particulars, which it would not be well to pass over without Notice. I would therefore,

I. Consider some of the particular Circumstances here mentioned; and then,

II. Answer this important Question, How a Person may judge whether a Promise or a Threatning comes from God, or is brought by Satan, to the Soul?

I. Let us take a View of the particular Circumstances or Complaints, of which this Case consists — These, we find, are various. Here is *Barrenness and Unfruitfulness* under abundant Means mentioned. Here is *Coldness and Lifelessness* complained of. Here is a *Fear of going backward*, and yet a Mind not suitably affected with it. This Person particularly complains of *Deadness at the Lord's Supper*, and of *being carried away with Temptations*; which occasions a Fear, *lest his abstaining from gross Immoralities does not arise rather from a Want of Temptations, than from a Hatred of Sin, and a Love to Holiness*. He is in a *Strait*, whether to conclude he has an *Interest in Christ* or not. He is afraid that his frequent Falls are inconsistent with an *Experience of the Grace of God*. And lastly, he is ready to conclude, that he should *sin less in neglecting, than in attending the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, because of his great Coldness there*. These are the various Complaints this Person makes; Complaints, all which are suitable to the Experience of the Christian, and which therefore

therefore deserve Consideration. Time indeed forbids our taking particular Notice of every one : Yet I would not wholly neglect them ; and therefore shall make a few general Observations, which will in some Respect refer to them all, and tend to direct, encourage, and strengthen the Christian under his various Fears.

1. *It is an unspeakable Mercy, when we have a deep and humbling Sense of our Barrenness, Deadness, and Unprofitableness, and to be enabled to spread it before the Lord.* Some Persons are mere Cumberers of the Ground indeed. They bring forth no real Fruit, and yet are entirely unconcerned about it. They enjoy all the Privileges of the Gospel, are favoured with all the Means of Grace ; and yet are absolutely unaffected with the great Concerns of Eternity, are Strangers to all real Religion ; but, notwithstanding all, think well of themselves, and, Hypocrite-like, say, *Stand by thyself, and come not near us ; for we are holier than thou.* Awful to be in such a Condition ! But is this your Case, my dear Friend ? You find a Coldness and Indifferency under these Means, and are afraid you are rather going backward than forward. You complain of Hardness and Insensibility : But remember, *felt Hardness* is not *real Hardness*. It is rather a Blessing, than a Judgment, and therefore calls for Thankfulness. It is a Stupidity felt, and lamented over, and not like the absolute Stupidity of the impenitent Sinner. Do you not carry your Complaints to God, and tell him of your Coldness, your Fears, your Insensibility ? Do you not appear humble in your own Eyes on this Account ? Are you not accusing yourself of your Ingratitude, and abhorring yourself for your Vileness ? This is no Evidence of a Hypocrite, but rather of a real Christian. A Hypocrite, that abstains from outward Immoralities, thinks all is well

well with him : But the Christian appears vile and odious in his own Eyes on account of the Sinfulness of his Heart. Though he has no public Sins to charge himself with, yet, when he looks within, he finds enough to make himself appear vile and despicable. 'Tis a peculiar Mercy to be made sensible of the Plague, the Wickedness, the Coldness of our Hearts, and to be deeply humbled under it. The Spirit of God always shews the Christian what he is, that he may the more readily acquiesce in the Method of Salvation exhibited in the Gospel. Be thankful then, Christians, that your Souls are not absolutely frozen and benumbed, but that you are sensible of, alarmed at, and humbled for your Indifferency and Lukewarmness, Barrenness and Unfruitfulness, under the Means of Grace.

2. *It is a good Evidence of our being Christians indeed, when we are not easy and contented under such a Sense of our Barrenness and Coldness, but find our Hearts filled with Desires, and are enabled to endeavour after greater Holiness.* Are you satisfied with Complaints? or do you think it is enough to mention them? Do you willingly rest here? Do you find no Self-Abhorrence on the Account of these Things, no Desires after Liveliness of Soul, no Concern to have Things better with you? Do you not pray for, endeavour and strive after greater Degrees and Measures of Grace? Then you are asleep indeed, and it is high Time to awake! 'Tis an awful Circumstance to be like the Door on its Hinges, and to have no Desire after an Alteration! to sit down, and feebly wish to be better, but cannot find a Heart to pray, and endeavour after a more spiritual Frame, and a growing Conformity to God! This is sometimes pretty nearly the Case with the Christian, when he is under the Power of any particular Corruption.

tion. Sin has caused a too great Insensibility in his Soul, and all his spiritual Powers appear asleep; as was the Case with *David*, when *Nathan* came to him. But is it thus with you, my Christian Mourner? May I not answer for you, and say, No? Are you satisfied to be in such a Condition? Do you not desire and long to have it otherwise with you? Nay, do you not pray, and cry, and strive to have Things altered with you? Are you contented with a few feeble Wishes? Sometimes, my Friend, you may appear to yourself to be in such a Condition: But at other Times are you not full of holy Concern about it? Don't you call upon your sleepy Soul to awake? Don't you beg to feel the Love of Christ melting your hard and stony Heart? Before Duties, are you not concerned to be kept from Coldness and Indifferency? and, at the Close of Duties, are you not humbled and ashamed under a View of your great Imperfections, and do you not apply afresh to the Blood of Christ for Pardon? And is not all this an Evidence of the Christian? Is there not in all this a Sense of the Excellency of Holiness, a real Love to it, and therefore an Evidence of a Work of Grace in the Heart? Oh bless God, that it is thus with you, that you can appeal to him, that you would have your Soul filled with greater Love to him, and brought into a warmer and more lively Frame!

3. *We should not make our fluctuating Frames, nor our being led away by a particular Temptation, a Mark of our being Hypocrites.* We are not to judge of ourselves by one particular Action in our Lives, or by an unbecoming Frame, that we may through the Power of Temptation be led into; but by the general Tendency of our Desires, Frames, and Conversation. Sometimes you find all dark within: You cannot call Christ your Saviour,  
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Sometimes you find a sad Benumbedness: Your Soul seems, like the Earth in Winter Frost, hard and incapable of Impression: The Love of a compassionate Saviour does not melt you, when you hear it. All this is consistent with a real Experience of the Grace of God. These different Frames are not uncommon. What must we conclude from them? They only shew us the Difference between Earth and Heaven, intimate the State of Imperfection we are in, and the sad Influence of Sin even in a renewed Heart; but do not by any Means give us Reason to conclude that we are but Almost-Christians. The Hypocrite is generally in one Frame: But the Christian's Frames are ever fluctuating. His Sky is not always long clear: But as the natural Sky is sometimes serene, and appears beautiful and pleasant, and again is stormy, dark, and tempestuous; so is it with a Christian's Soul. Don't then draw any discouraging Conclusion from your various Frames. Let a Consideration of it keep you humble, make you watchful, and fill you with warmer Desires after the heavenly World, where your Love will never grow cool, nor your Enjoyments meet with any Interruption; but don't conclude from hence that you are not Christians indeed.

4. *We should ever maintain a godly Jealousy over our Hearts, yet we should take care and guard against Unbelief.* We should ever rejoice with Trembling. Upon every Eruption of Sin, and Interruption in our Frame, we should take the Alarm, inquire into the Reason of it, and watch the Heart with all Diligence, knowing that it is *deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked.* Yet we are not to give Way to Disputings and Unbelief, because our Hearts are treacherous: For, if so, we may be always under the Power of distressing Fears, and never enjoy any Satisfaction or Peace, saying, we may

may be deceived. There is a great Difference between a godly Jealousy and Unbelief. If after Examination our Consciences do not condemn us, we have no Reason to be uneasy. This Person knows not what Conclusion to draw concerning himself. He is afraid to say he is a Christian, there are so many Circumstances that appear discouraging; and yet he would not deny what God has done for him. Do not hesitate between two Opinions. If, so far as you know your own Heart, you have been enabled to give up yourself to Jesus Christ, and receive him in all his Characters; if your Conscience does not contradict you, when you say, you hope you love the Redeemer; you may, and ought to draw a favourable Conclusion concerning your State, and to wait for the clearer Testimony of the Spirit to make it plain to you. Don't, my Friends, be always disputing: That can be of no Service to your Souls. It will break in upon your Peace, dishonour God, and perhaps provoke him to leave you in the Dark. Oh, hope and trust! Don't cast away your Confidence. Endeavour to live in a thankful Frame, considering what God has done for you, and rejoice in the Evidences of his distinguishing Grace, and give God all the Glory.

5. *We may be growing Christians, and yet not find our Affections always lively.* If we judge of our State and of our Progress in Grace by Affection, we shall be in Danger either of running into all the wild Reveries of Enthusiasm, or else of falling into Despair. Affections may be raised, and yet there be no Grace: And, on the other hand, we may have our Affections dull, or seem almost to be void of Affections, when compared with some Persons; and yet we may not only have Grace, but be growing in Grace. Our Affections may not be lively, and our Souls all on Fire; and yet we may really

really love Christ, and be making some Progress in the divine Life. Young Christians are often led by Affection; therefore their Hopes are ever fluctuating. If they are not lively, they conclude they are no better than Hypocrites. Constitution makes a great Difference as to the Liveliness or Dullness of our Affections; and so does the present State of the Body; And these Things should always be considered. Some can weep at Pleasure; whilst others are incapable of shedding a Tear. Some appear all alive; others are of a heavier Cast, and yet are solid growing Christians, and have a rich Experience in divine Things. It is doubtless pleasant and profitable too to have our Affections raised by divine Truths. When our Chariot-Wheels move on swiftly, and the Fire burns within us, it is sweet meditating, praying, reading, hearing, or conversing. Yet we must not judge of the Work of God in the Soul by the Liveliness of our Affections altogether. Indeed, when a Person, naturally of lively Affections, finds a growing Coldness and Indifferency to spiritual Duties, and is all alive when pursuing the Things of Sense, it is a sad Sign at least of a bad Frame. But though he does not find his Soul lively in Duty; yet, if he is labouring after a greater Deadness to the World, if he is secretly mourning after God, and lamenting over Sin; if he is pressing on towards the Mark, and seeking after a greater Conformity to Jesus; if he is more careful against Sin, and watchful over his own Heart; he is a growing Christian, though in waiting upon God he may not find his Affections so lively as he would. The Tree does not only grow in Summer, when it appears in all its Gaiety; but even in Winter, when it appears to the Eye as dead. So the Christian in his Winter-Seasons may grow in Humility, in a Knowledge of his  
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own Heart, and in Love to Christ and Holiness, though Clouds and Darkness are round about him, and his Countenance may wear an awful Gloom.

6. *Lifeness and Coldness in Ordinances ought not to discourage us from waiting upon God in them.* If we must leave off waiting upon God for this, the Ordinances must not be administered, because all Christians at Times feel this Coldness. We should be humbled for it, but not discouraged. It is unpleasant to find a Deadness in our Spirits; but it should not stumble us. We should search into the Reasons of it. Perhaps you have taken no Pains with yourselves to get your Souls into a warm Frame, before you came to Ordinances. Be not surprized then that the Spirit was withdrawn. Perhaps you were not concerned as you ought to keep a strict Watch over your Hearts in Ordinances: Or, perhaps there is some Sin you have been guilty of, which is not yet lamented over. God may therefore stand at a Distance, and your Souls be cold and lifeless. Inquire therefore into the Reason of your Coldness, and endeavour to get it removed; but be not discouraged. This Person particularly complains, that, *if he is more lifeless at one Time than another, it is at the Lord's Supper; therefore imagines he should sin less in neglecting, than in attending it.* This is no natural Consequence. It may be your Duty to attend at the Lord's Table; yet in some Circumstances you may be out of the Way of Duty. Perhaps you may have placed too much Dependence upon the Ordinance, and thought that there you must be always comfortable and lively. God has therefore disappointed your Expectations, that you may be taught not to lay such a Stress upon Ordinances. You have perhaps depended too much upon your Preparations, or else you have rushed too boldly upon the Ordinance. Or, perhaps God

God may, for the Trial of your Faith and Patience, withdraw his special Presence from you, to humble you, and to lead you to a greater Dependence upon Jesus Christ.

If you desire to wait upon Christ with spiritual Views, and in a spiritual Frame; if you are watchful over your Heart, and labour after a quickening View of the Love of Jesus, and a true Sense of the Nature and Design of the Ordinance; go on waiting upon him. In Time he may give you his comforting Presence. Remember, you are not singular in your Complaints; and you may receive real Advantage from an Ordinance, though you may not be in so desirable a Frame, as you would wish. Having given you these few Hints for your Encouragement and Direction, I now proceed to consider the particular Question here proposed:

II. *How may a Person judge whether a Promise or a Threatning comes from God, or is brought by Satan, to the Soul?* The Occasion of this Question is as follows: This Person found some of the Promises of God's Word brought with peculiar Sweetness and Power upon his Mind; and these were succeeded by awful Threatnings, which appeared to come with equal Force. Now it is of great Importance to know whether these come from the Spirit of God, or from Satan; or which of these properly belongs to us, and points out our State, whether the Promise or the Threatning; that so we may not be deceiving ourselves on the one hand with false Hopes, and yet that we may not give Way to Unbelief on the other, if we have Encouragement to hope. Satan often transforms himself into an Angel of Light, as well as appears in the Character of a roaring Lion, and makes Use both of Scripture Promises and Threatnings to carry on his Purposes. Thus then it is a  
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Matter of Importance to be able to distinguish when these come from Satan, and when from God. I shall therefore hint two or three Things, which I hope will be sufficient to direct and guide us in this interesting Affair. And,

I. *Let us inquire, how we may know whether a Promise, or any comfortable Portion of Scripture, that is brought to our Minds, comes from God, or from Satan.* And, to guide us in our Determination of this, we should always consider the Circumstances and State of our Souls at the Time when the Promise comes to us, and the immediate End and Design, Tendency and Influence of it upon us.

1. *We should consider the Circumstances we are in, when a Promise or a comfortable Portion of Scripture comes to us.* For Instance—Are we living in the Practice of known Sins? Are we secretly or openly gratifying any particular Lust? Are we living in the Omission of evident appointed Duties? If a Promise comes to us in such Circumstances, to encourage us with the Hopes of Heaven, we have Reason to question its coming from God; because we cannot suppose he will manifest himself unto any, who are walking in evident Disobedience to his Commands. Is a Christian under the Power of any particular Corruption? Is he sleepy, dead, and careless? He has Reason to question whether a comforting Promise comes from God, if any such comes before his Mind, unless he has been humbled for his Backslidings, and has fled to the Blood of Jesus for Pardon. God has always chastised his People, and frowned upon them, when running astray from him. *Psal. lxxxix. 30—33.* Therefore *David* himself was sorely distressed, after he had been guilty of Adultery and Murder. All Antinomian Principles and Practices are justly detestable in the

Sight of God; and so they ought to be in ours. Will God comfort a Creature, that is wallowing in all the Mire of Sin? No: If you are a Lover of Sin, you have no Promise from God to support you; and whatever of that Kind comes before you, is brought by Satan, who endeavours to entertain the Hypocrite with the pleasing Hopes of Heaven, and so to lead him into a dangerous Security. Examine then your Circumstances. How is it with you, when a Promise comes? Has your Case been represented as above? Then your Circumstances are awful and melancholy indeed! But, if your Souls are in Darkness, mourning and longing after an absent Lord; if you are hungering and thirsting after Righteousness; if you are seeking after a Sense of the Love of God, walking humbly with him, and pressing towards greater Degrees of Holiness; in this Case, when any Promise is brought to your Mind with any Degree of Power, you may conclude that it comes from the Spirit of God\*.

2. *We should inquire into the immediate End and Tendency of a Promise brought to us, and its Influence upon us.* For Example—If it lulls us to Security, and gives us any Hopes of eternal Life, though we are careless and indolent; if it leads us to Presumption, encoura-

\* I may here add one Way, by which we may know whether we have an Interest in the Promises we find in the Word of God. We may generally observe something in a Promise, that is descriptive of the Persons who have an Interest in it. Thus, that glorious Promise in *Isai. xli. 20.* *Fear not; for I am with thee: Be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right Hand of my Righteousness.* This Promise is evidently made to those, that fear that God is not with them, and are dismayed, *lest God should not be their God.* Those then, that are in these Circumstances, have an Interest in this Promise---- Thus we may find something in most other Promises and comfortable Passages of Scripture, to direct us whether we have an Interest in them, or not.

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geth us to Sin, and yet assures us of an Interest in Jesus Christ; we may look upon it as coming from Satan, who is willing to give us all possible Encouragement, provided it does not produce in us a Hatred of Sin, and a Love to Holiness. But if, on the other hand, the Promise, when it comes, melts our hard Hearts, and fills us with Admiration of the Love and rich distinguishing Grace of God; if it not only scatters our Fears, and fills us with Joy, but makes us humble; if it endears a Saviour more to us, and tends to bring us into a greater Conformity to God; if, in fine, it leads us into a more evangelical Frame, even that Frame that honours God, and is suited to the Scheme of Salvation in the Gospel; we may then conclude that it comes from God, and not from the Enemy. A Promise, having such an Influence upon the Soul, answers all the Ends for which it is revealed. Now we cannot suppose, that Satan would bring a Promise to answer these important Purposes: This would be acting against himself, and destroying his own Kingdom: For the more humble we are, the more Christ is endeared to us, and the less is Satan's Influence upon us.—Thus then we have Reason to conclude that a Promise in these Circumstances comes from God.

II. *Let us now consider Threatnings and awful Passages of Scripture*—As there is a Variety of these in the Word of God, and they are designed for Usefulness; yet are often made use of to answer other Purposes; so it is of Importance to us to know, when these come to us from the Spirit of God, and when from the Enemy. Now we may take the same Method in judging of these, as we did in judging of Promises; viz. consider the Circumstances we are in, view the End and Design of Threatnings, when they come, and then examine their

Influence upon us. Thus, if Threatnings, or awful Passages of Scripture, come with a Design to rob us of our spiritual Comfort, to stagger our Faith, and bring us into Despair, we may conclude they come from Satan, and not from God — But, if we are slothful and secure; if we have been running into Sin, omitting known Duties, and are not yet awake; if the Means that have been used, have not been made effectual to revive us, and these Threatnings or awful Passages seem brought to our Minds with a Design to rouse us, and to stir us up to greater Diligence in our Christian Course; if, in fine, they have this Influence upon us, we may conclude they come from God; for these are the Purposes they are designed to answer. We have a Variety of Passions to work upon. Promises, endearing Representations of the Love of Christ, &c. are designed to touch the finer Springs of human Nature, to move the softer Passions. Threatnings and awful Representations, of Hell, &c. are designed to alarm us, to compel, and, as it were, drive us. Thus God makes use of various Arguments to begin and carry on his Work in us. This Use then we should make of the more awful Parts of Scripture. A View of them should make us admire that Grace, that has plucked us as Brands out of everlasting Burnings; fill us with a godly Jealousy over our Hearts; make us seriously inquire whether we are Christians indeed; and stir us up to press forward with growing Chearfulness, towards the Mark for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus. When Threatnings appear to be brought with this View, and when they have this Influence upon us, they are as Means in the Hands of God for our Good. But, when they forbid our Hopes, and draw us to Despair, we may conclude there is the Hand of Satan in it.

it. Upon the whole, so far as Threatnings promote our greater Holiness and spiritual Advantage, so far they are useful, and answer their End; but, so far as they weaken our Hands, discourage our Souls, and lead us from God, so far they are made use of by the Enemy of Souls to our spiritual Hurt — Thus then inquire, you who have had Promises, or Threatnings, or both, come upon your Minds with any Degree of Force, inquire what Circumstances you were in, what the direct Tendency of these Promises or Threatnings was, and what Influence they had upon you; and from hence you may in some Measure determine whether they came from God, or from the Enemy. I shall now conclude with one Remark, *viz.*

*How glorious is Heaven, and how happy the Believer there!* Here we are fluctuating between Hope and Fear: We often hang our Harp upon the Willows: We are watering our Couch with Tears, and are exposed to the Fury of the roaring Lion. Oh happy Alteration, when we reach the Mansions above, to find all Sin perfectly destroyed, every Fear scattered! no longer to know what it is to be in Darkness, or what the least Degree of Coldness means! Desirable State! to be present with the Lord, and to find his Presence animating our Souls with the noblest Ardour in his Service! to have the whole Conduct of Providence laid before us, and every Mystery sweetly unravelled! to look back upon the many Instances of Divine Wisdom and Grace in our Salvation; to find ourselves got safe over *Jordan*, and appearing in all the Glory of the Children of God, and triumphing as Kings and Priests! Blessed World!  
“ Hail, happy Day, when it will be thus with me!  
“ Come, thou important Period, when this earthly Tabernacle shall be dissolved! Haste that joyful Mo-

“ment, when I shall at once be delivered from all my  
“Sins, and all my Sorrows; when I shall no more  
“stand in Need of Promises or Threatnings, the one  
“to comfort, the other to quicken me; having the  
“glorious uninterrupted Views of my exalted Media-  
“tor, and the sweetest, fullest Manifestations of his  
“Love, to keep the sacred Fire ever burning in me, to  
“fill me with Joy unspeakable, and to engage my un-  
“wearied and everlasting Praises!” Thus may we long  
and breathe after the heavenly State, and in God’s own  
Time make the glorious Exchange. Amen.

CASE



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CASE V.

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*How far may a Person judge of the Strength or Weakness of his Faith by the Brightness or Darkeness of his Frames?*

THE Growth of Grace in the Heart of a true Believer is a very mysterious Thing; and there is scarcely any Particular whereby Christians in general are more puzzled, and wherein they are more frequently mistaken, than in judging of the Strength or Weakness of their Graces. 'Tis very common for those to judge themselves *declining* in Spiritual Experience, who are really growing apace in the Divine Life; and for those to esteem themselves *improving*, who are in Reality decaying and withering. I cannot but apprehend that the Foundation of these Mistakes lies in their not properly distinguishing between *Faith* and *Frames*. We are apt to judge of the former by the latter; accounting our Faith and other Graces to be strong, when our Frames are comfortable and lively; and thinking that Faith must certainly be weak, when these our Frames are dark and distressing. But, were this Rule just and valid, there would be no Manner of Difficulty in measuring the Degree of Grace in us; because no Believer can be at a Loss to know whether he is in a comfortable or uncomfortable Frame. But that this is an improper Standard to measure the Degrees of Grace by, is very evident; because nothing is more variable than our Frames, as they are continually waxing and waning alternately.

alternately. In this Respect we are scarce a Day at a Stand; yea, an Hour often makes a great Alteration herein: Whereas it cannot be supposed that Grace itself is so very changeable; for *the Path of the just is as the shining Light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect Day*, Prov. iv. 18.

This Case is taken under Consideration in Consequence of two distinct Letters transmitted to me; the one regarding comfortable Frames, and the other uncomfortable ones. These two Letters contain several experimental Queries and Difficulties, all of which center in, and may be solved by a proper Answer to the single Question above-specified. The Letters themselves you will find hereafter inserted in their proper Places, where a distinct Answer is given to them.

Be pleased therefore to attend seriously to the following Observations relating to Faith and Frames.

1. *A strong Faith tends to produce and promote a bright and comfortable Frame.* This must be granted, from the Nature of saving Faith, and from the express Declarations of the Divine Word. Nothing tends more to take away our Doubts, to clear up our Evidences, and to comfort our Hearts, than the strong and lively Exercises of a living Faith in the Lord Jesus, as a free and complete Saviour. Faith is often set in Opposition to distressing Fears. *I will trust*, says the Church, *and not be afraid*, Isai. xii. 2. We read likewise of the *Joy of Faith*, and the *Assurance of Faith*; of being *filled with all Joy and Peace in believing*, and of *rejoicing by Faith in Christ with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*. These Scripture-Phrases sufficiently testify, that there is no better Way of having our Evidences clear, and our Comforts strong, than by exercising our Faith, Trust, and Dependence upon a free and glorious Saviour. If then we would be truly com-

comfortable; let us desire and endeavour to live by Faith on Christ, and aim at direct Acts of Recumbency upon him; for the more we can, by the realizing and appropriating Acts of Faith, see of the Freeness and Fulness of Divine Grace in Christ, the more Experience we shall have of evangelical Supports and Consolations. On the contrary, we must observe, that

2. *The Weakness of Faith tends to promote and produce dark and uncomfortable Frames.* For since *Fear* and *Faith* are set in direct Opposition to each other, therefore, as Faith declines, so in Proportion Fears prevail. The declining of Faith in its Strength and Activity gives Way for our Corruptions to work, for Temptations to assault and overpower us, for distressing Fears to arise; and then the Light of God's Countenance withdraws, and our Evidences for Heaven are darkened and clouded. As soon as ever we begin to distrust the Power of Christ, the Faithfulness of the Promises, or the absolute Freeness of Grace, we are sinking. Thus *Peter*, when walking upon the Water at Christ's Command and in Christ's Strength, is upheld, as if walking upon firm Ground, so long as his Faith in Christ's Power and Kindness is maintained: But no sooner does he attend to the Boisterousness of the Wind, and withdraw his Dependence from Christ, but he begins to sink; his Heart to sink within him, and his Body to sink in the Waves. And mark what a tender and instructive Rebuke Christ gives him upon that Occasion, *Matt. xiv. 31. O thou of little Faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?* Much Doubting argues little Faith. Nothing can be more prejudicial both to our Comfort and Holiness, than to suspect the almighty Power and free Grace of Christ.

These two Observations being made and proved, some may be ready to imagine, it necessarily follows, that

that we are to judge of the Strength or Weakness of our Faith, in all Cases, by the Brightness or Darkness of our Frames. And the Conclusion would be just, were it not for the two following Observations. For, notwithstanding all that has been said and allowed, yet,

3. *A Believer may be in a dark, uncomfortable Frame, and yet be strong in Faith; and that not only in the Grace of Faith, but in its Exercise too.* I acknowledge, that this at first View may seem mysterious, and contradictory to what has been declared. And it is this one Thing which perplexes and stumbles our Friend, who wrote one of the Letters, when he asks, “Are not “Light and Peace the peculiar Privileges and Effects “of Faith?” This Consideration, my Friend, is perplexing not to you only, but to many others. Let me therefore attempt to shew you, in a plain and evident Manner, how this Case really stands. *Are Light and Peace the peculiar Effects of Faith?* I answer, yes; but not in such a Way as supposes that all our Distress and Darkness must arise from the *Want* or *Weakness* of Faith. A few scriptural Instances will make this appear abundantly evident. What think you of the Condition of the Church, as expressed in *Micah vii. 8*? The Church was at that Time in great Darkness; and under heavy Complaints, and yet was strong, very strong, in Faith; as appears by the Language there used. *Rejoice not against me, O mine Enemy! When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in Darkness, the LORD shall be a Light unto me.*

Again, Was not *Job* in a very dark Frame, and under great Agony of Spirit, when he says, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him?* *Job xiii. 15.*

And what shall we say concerning the poor Woman of *Canaan*, mentioned *Matt. xv. 21—28.* who renewed her Petition, and would not be driven away by the

the seeming Repulses she met with from the Lord *Jesus*? Was not her Agony great, her Soul in deep Distress, when she heard our Lord say, *It is not meet to take the Children's Bread, and cast it to the Dogs?* But it is indubitably clear that her Faith was real; yea, that it was very strong, vehement, and skilful in its Exercise, under this Distress, when she replied, *Truth, Lord; yet the Dogs eat of the Crumbs that fall from their Master's Table.* Such Instances, which I have here adduced, are frequently brought as Proofs of real Faith, though attended with Weakness, Doubts, and Fears. But in Reality these are Specimens of Faith in its *strangest* Efforts and Acts.

You may therefore well ask, how can these Things be? If the Strength of Faith tends to a bright Frame, and the Weakness of Faith to a dark Frame, how is it possible that Faith should be so lively and strong, and yet the Experience of the Soul so distressed and complaining? I shall endeavour to explain this Paradox by a familiar Simile. Compare spiritual Things with natural; and let the Strength of Faith be represented by bodily Strength. A Person may be very strong in his Body, yea, and exercise that Strength to the utmost, when under a very heavy Burden, and not be so easy or comfortable in himself, as one who has not half his Strength, and has no Burden, or but a light one, to carry. We are not to judge a Person to be weak, merely because he faints, and pants, and labours; nor to judge a Person to be strong, merely because he seems lively and active. We must take in the Burdens a Person has to bear, or the Difficulties he has to encounter with, in order to pass a right Judgment upon his Ability. Now apply this to the Case similar to it in spiritual Affairs, If a Person strong in Faith is tried,  
has

has many great Duties to perform, or many and heavy Trials to struggle with, or many weighty Burdens upon him; these Things may so put his strong Faith to a Stand or Difficulty, as to make him ready to sink and fail. They may take away or suppress all the sensible Pleasure and Joy of Faith, and may make him complain as under Distress and Darknes. Thus you see Faith may be very strong, and very strong in its Exercise too, and yet yield no sensible Pleasure or Exultation, by Reason of the great Things it has to conflict with and fight against. These Thoughts may likewise help our Conceptions in the last Observation, which is, that

4. *A Person may be very weak in Faith, and yet his Frames be bright and comfortable.* This is a Case not at all uncommon among Christians. Observe, the newly converted Person, who is just brought out of Darknes into Light, has the Principle of Grace newly implanted: We cannot suppose that such an one in common is strong in Faith, when the Seed is but just sown in his Heart, or but just sprung up. And yet we find this new-born Babe in Christ is frequently favoured with peculiar Joys and Consolations. And it is very clear, that this newly regenerate Person has not his Faith as yet strengthened or established, notwithstanding all his Exultations and spiritual Delights: For, if there be but a little Withdrawment of the Light of God's Countenance, or if he be assaulted by but a small Temptation, we find his Faith appears then to be exceeding weak or unskilful, not able to stand the Shock of the Temptation, or not sufficiently skilful to expound the Meaning of the spiritual Withdrawment. A very little Change in Experience often stumbles the Faith, shakes the Hope, and discourages the Heart of him who is newly convinced and comforted. This surely is an infallible Indication

tion that his Faith is weak, although he may be favoured with much spiritual Sweetness and Delight. A little Child may as well imagine that he is a strong Man, because he is dandled upon his Father's Knees, and enjoys his Father's Smiles, as a newly converted Person conclude his Faith is firm, because his spiritual Comforts are enlarged. Neither should we confine this Remark to the new-born Babe in Christ; because there are many, who have had some standing in the Grace of Christ, and yet remain very weak in Knowledge, and very feeble in their Faith: And these we find are sometimes favoured with great spiritual Enjoyments. Their Corruptions are suppressed, their Evidences clear, by the Spirit shining upon his own Work; and for that Reason they cannot but be comfortable and joyful in their Frames for a Season. Now their Souls are saying, *My Mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved.* Yet, no sooner does God hide his Face, or permit a Corruption to arise, but their Souls are affrighted, and their Hearts discouraged. This is a plain Token that their Faith is really weak, at the very Time when their Comforts are strong. And thus it comes to pass, that those, who are weak in Faith, are sometimes the most comfortable; and those, who are strong in Faith, often have less of these spiritual Enjoyments.

These Things being premised, we may from thence gather a true Answer to the Questions proposed in the two Letters, that occasioned this Discourse: Which may be thus disposed.

1. *How shall we know whether the Darknes of our Frames arises from the Weakness of our Faith?* This Query in Substance seems to be aimed at in one of the Letters, which runs thus:

“ Sir,

“ Sir,  
 “ I AM one, who, through rich Grace, have been  
 “ taught to know and feel myself a Sinner, and  
 “ have been favoured with a clear Manifestation of the  
 “ Love of God in Christ Jesus by the Teachings and  
 “ Witnessings of the Spirit: But yet I do sometimes  
 “ walk in Darkness. May I humbly beg Leave to pro-  
 “ pose the following Questions to you? What is the  
 “ Cause of this Darkness? Doth it not proceed from  
 “ Corruptions within, from Temptations from with-  
 “ out, or from the Omission of Duty, or the Com-  
 “ mission of Sin? How may I be able to judge of the  
 “ Cause, when under a dark Experience and clouded  
 “ Evidences, so that I cannot see Him, whom my Soul  
 “ loveth? Are not Light and Peace the peculiar Privi-  
 “ leges and Effects of Faith? O Sir! I am often apt  
 “ to distress my Soul, lest I have sinned, and caused  
 “ the Lord to hide away his Face from me.”

In Answer to these affecting Queries, I must say,

If you, my Friend, are conscious to yourself of the Commission of any particular Sin, or of the Omission of any particular known Duty, this Consciousness will certainly enfeeble your Confidence in God, and will cause you to walk in Darkness and Distress; and you can never arrive at true Comfort again, until you have been enabled frankly to confess your Sin with humble Shame and Self-Abhorrence, and to make a fresh Application for, and a fresh Application of the atoning Blood of Christ by a living Faith. Witness the holy Psalmist, in *Psal.* xxxii. 3, 4, 5.

While he kept Silence, and would not, through Shame, or Fear, or Pride, ingenuously own before the LORD



CASE V.] *Cases of Conscience.*

79

his Guilt and Sin, his Distress increased, and he could gain no Ease or Relief: But, when his Heart was opened, and he said, *I will confess my Transgression to the LORD*, then he received a sweet Sense of free Pardon.

Contracted Guile is a very sufficient Cause of Dark-ness; and you can expect no other, but that God should frown upon your Soul; or hide his Face from you, and leave you to Sorrow and Anguish of Spirit. Your Conscience should therefore seriously inquire into this Matter; and if, upon Inquiry, it be found that something done or neglected lies at the Bottom of the spiritual Complaint; you can receive no true Consolation, until you have, with humble Shame and by a humble Faith, cast your Burden upon the LORD. And let me intreat you to beware of any Consolation that does not come it at this Door.

With Regard to Corruptions from within, or Temptations from without, these likewise may be the Cause of the Darkness in your Frames, and cast a Cloud over your Evidences. But in this Case, it does not presently follow, that your Faith is weak. If these Corruptions be unallowed and lamented, and these Temptations opposed and resisted, there may be great Grace and strong Faith exercised in these Circumstances. 'Tis true, that such Corruptions and Temptations will necessarily rob you of your Comfort, and hinder you of a free and delightful Enjoyment of God, so long as they are permitted to assault and perplex you. But, if these disagreeable Trials and Experiences do not sink you into Discouragement, and do only quicken and excite you to fight against the Temptations, and to mortify the Corruptions, in the Strength of Christ; your Faith is strong, though your Soul is disquieted. While Faith is acting under these Disadvantages, it is incapable

ble of filling you with Joy and Consolation, until it has gained some Conquest over these Enemies of your Peace; but yet it may be vigorous in its Exercise to withstand these Temptations, and to plead the Promises for Deliverance from the Power of these rising Corruptions.

By the foregoing Thoughts you may judge, whether the Darkness of your Frames arises from the Weakness of your Faith, or no. If under these Complaints your Heart sinks, your Spirits are discouraged, so that you are ready to lay down the Weapons of Opposition, and to quit the Field of Battle; this is a Sign that Faith is weak. But if, when a Veil is cast over your Evidences, you are enabled to exercise direct Acts of Reliance and Recumbency upon Christ; if, when Corruption arises, or Temptation assaults, you are not sunk, but only humbled hereby, and quickened to fly to Christ for Strength to mortify Sin and overcome Temptation; and are determined still to fight and pray, to pray and fight, against these spiritual Enemies; then the Darkness of your Soul does not arise from the Weakness of your Faith, but should be looked upon as only a Trial and a Proof of its Strength.

2. *How shall we know whether the Brightness of our Frames arises from the Strength of our Faith?* Some Believers have little or no Notion of any Comfort or spiritual Satisfaction, but what arises from Reflection or Self-Examination; and therefore bend their whole Course this Way, in order to attain bright Frames and comfortable Evidences; and are ready to look upon the Satisfaction they obtain in this Manner as the Assurance of Faith, and as almost the only Proof of the Strength of this excellent Grace: While others are for paying such a Regard to the Comfort arising from direct Acts  
of

of Faith upon Christ, that they are tempted to despise or neglect the great Duty of Self-Examination. But it is highly necessary to keep a proper Medium between these two Extremes, in order to know whether the Degree of our Consolation and Satisfaction proceeds from the Growth and Exercise of this noble Principle.

It will be proper to introduce in this Place the Substance of the other Letter; which runs to this Effect:

Sir,

I HAVE for many Years past made it my constant Practice to set apart a serious Hour for Self-Examination: And as the Word of God is the only unerring Rule, whereby to judge of spiritual Things, I have (after earnest Prayer for the Assistance of the blessed Spirit) taken some Text of Scripture; such as that, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* In prosecuting the solemn Inquiry, I have endeavoured to find out the Account of Faith, its Fruits and Effects, as described in the Word of God. The Effect of this Practice as to my Comfort has been various, as I could more or less discover the Spirit's Work on my Heart. Now, Sir, the Question I would humbly propose is this: Whether a Believer may not warrantably take Comfort from the Spirit's Work on his Heart, as an Evidence of his Interest in Christ?"

This serious Letter describes a Practice, that I would earnestly recommend to all those who are desirous to go safely and comfortably in the Way to Heaven. And as for the Question here proposed, I would answer, without the least Hesitation, that a Believer may and ought, upon serious Examination and Prayer, to take Comfort

from, be thankful for, and rejoice in every Evidence of true Grace, as so many Seals of the Spirit, whereby the Believer is sealed up unto the Day of Redemption. But then remember, that the Comforts arising from hence are *of themselves* no Evidence of the Growth or Strength of Faith: For, if a Believer receives the *Whole* of his Comfort from the Satisfaction he gathers this Way, it is a Proof that his Faith is really very weak; yea, and the Comfort itself will prove very *wavering* and uncertain. This our Friend justly acknowledges in his Letter, when he says, that the Effect of his Practice has been very *various* as to Comfort: And no Wonder; for, if a Person builds his Hope upon his Evidences, they will be found a very uncertain Basis; these Evidences being sometimes clear, and sometimes cloudy and dark. But, blessed be God! these are not the Ground of our Hope; for that does not consist in any Thing wrought in us, but in the absolute Freeness of Grace in Christ, for any poor distressed Soul to lay hold of, fly to, and rest upon. This Freeness of Grace is an everlasting and stable Foundation, which does not change with our Frames. And I am verily persuaded, that many Believers are so much attached to Comfort drawn from Evidences (as if it were the only Comfort) that they have very much lost the Strength and Skill of Faith. For the Business of Faith is, not to live and depend upon a Work of Grace in us, but humbly and confidently to refer ourselves unto the free and powerful Grace of God without us, under a real Sight and Conviction of our own Weakness, Emptiness, Pollution, Guilt, and Unworthiness.

But, if you would know whether the Comforts you obtain by Self-Examination are attended with the Growth and Vigour of Faith, it is needful you should inquire  
into

into the Nature and Kind of them. Perhaps it may be only a *cold, speculative Satisfaction*. You by the Exercise of Reason compare your Experience with the Word of God, and so coldly draw the important Conclusion, but feel no endearing, enlivening, sanctifying Effect from it. If this be all, here is nothing of the Work of Faith or the Exercise of Grace in it. Nay, it is possible for the Comfort obtained this Way to be of a *Soul-sufficing Nature*. When you have drawn this Conclusion, it is used only to still the Anxieties and relieve the Distresses of the Soul, to make you the more contented under the Prevalency of some Corruption, under the Consciousness of some Guilt, or under the Power of a carnal Frame. If this be the Tendency of the Satisfaction you gain by Examination, it is a sad Sort of Comfort indeed! and, let the Inference be drawn with ever so much Justness or Clearness, yet it proves the Soul to be in a dangerous and declining Frame.

Once more: A Believer, in performing the Duty of Self-Examination, ought to take special Care about the *Ends* he has in it. What is it, that you aim at in searching after Evidences of Grace within you? Is it to obtain an Assurance that your State is safe, that you might silence the Clamours of a guilty Conscience, or that you might remove that Uneasiness, which your Mind feels, because of the Power of Corruption or carnal Security; to sooth your Mind with this Thought, that all is well, because you have a secure Interest in Christ and the Covenant? If this be your Aim and Desire, give me the Freedom to say, that this is to continue in *Siti*, because Grace abounds. And therefore Evidences, thus obtained and thus employed, are exceedingly dangerous and very suspicious.

But, if you seek after and improve the Evidences of a Work of Grace in your Soul, to help you forward in farther Actings of Faith upon Christ, to encourage you to be more frequent, fervent, and confident in your Application to Christ for fresh Supplies of Soul-sanctifying, Sin-subduing, and Heart-strengthening Grace; then your Comfort is of the right Kind, and the Brightness of your Frame proves the Strength of your Faith. Upon the whole, we may gather,

3. *How we may know whether our Faith be strong or weak, let our Frames be what they will.* 'Tis not our being in a dark Frame, but our being discouraged by it to lay down our Weapons against Sin and Satan in a Kind of despairing Way, that proves the Weakness of our Faith. 'Tis not our being in a bright Frame, but our being thereby quickened and encouraged to fly to Christ, and trust in him for farther Grace and Strength, that proves the Strength of our Faith. If our Frames are dark, gloomy, and distressing; and these Distresses quicken our Desires after saving Grace, and we are excited to earnest Prayers and fiducial Pleadings for the Blessings of Grace, and to fight against Sin and Temptation in the Strength of Christ; this proves that our Faith is strong, though our Comforts may be very low; and our Sorrows very great. If our Frames are bright and delightful, and our Souls take all our Comfort from what we feel, and we begin to trust in or rest satisfied with Grace received; this proves that our Faith is weak and unskilful, though our Comforts are strong, and our Evidences clear to ourselves.

I shall conclude the whole with the following very brief and compendious Advices to Believers concerning their Frames.

Are .

Are your Frames *comfortable*?

You may make them the Matter of your *Praise*, but not of your *Pride*.

You may make them your *Pleasure*, but not your *Portion*.

You may make them the Matter of your *Encouragement*, but not the Ground of your *Security*.

Are your Frames *dark and uncomfortable*?

They should *humble* you, but not *discourage* you.

They should *quicken* you, and not *obstruct* you, in your Application for necessary and suitable Grace.

They should make you see your own *Emptiness*, but not make you suspect the *Fulness* of Christ.

They should make you see your own *Unworthiness*, but not make you suspect the *Willingness* of Christ.

They should make you see your own *Weakness*, but not cause you to suspect the *Strength* of Christ.

They should make you suspect your own *Heart*, but not the *Firmness* and *Freeness* of the *Promises*.

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# CASE VI.

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*Whether a Person, who has been a great Sinner, has any Ground to expect Pardon, and the Comforts of the Holy Ghost; and whether he may partake of all the Ordinances of God?*

This Question is supported by the following Letter:

Reverend Sir,

“ I TAKE this Opportunity to inquire your Judgment on the State of my Soul, which is as follows: I am a young Person, who have had a religious Education, but, alas! I soon followed the base Inclinations of my own Heart, and stuck at nothing, let it be ever so vile, till it pleased God, by Conversation with a good Man upon the evil Nature of Sin, to fasten deep Convictions upon my Mind. Then, what Terrors, Torture, and Anguish did I feel! How was my Mind filled with horrid Blasphemies! So that I concluded I was given up to a reprobate Mind, and that there was no Place for Repentance, if I fought it never so carefully with Tears. In this awful Condition I continued eighteen Months, when it pleased God to magnify the Riches of his Grace to the very chief of all Sinners, in sending the glorious Comforter to set my Soul at Liberty, and make me rejoice with unspeakable Joy. But, notwithstanding this, when I look back, and consider my great Vileness, I am ready to dispute its being a Reality. There-  
“ fore



“ fore I have sent you the above Question, to which  
 “ may the Lord enable you to give a comfortable and  
 “ speedy Answer!”

**T**HIS is a Case that we frequently meet with ;  
 a Case that deserves our serious Considera-  
 tion, as it may tend to encourage many dis-  
 tressed Sinners in a proper Application to  
 Jesus Christ for Salvation, and give them the most ad-  
 miring and animating Views of the Riches of divine  
 Grace manifested therein. In Hopes that these Ends may  
 be in some Measure answered, I would consider these  
 two Things:

I. *Whether a Person, who has been a great Sinner, has  
 any Ground to expect Pardon, and the Comforts of the  
 Holy Ghost? — And,*

II. *Whether he may partake of, all the Ordinances of  
 God?*

I. *I am to shew whether a Person, who has been a great  
 Sinner, has any Ground to expect Pardon, and the Com-  
 forts of the Holy Ghost. If he continues hardened, and  
 is obstinately determined to live in the Gratification of  
 any criminal Lust and Passion, he has no Reason to  
 expect either Pardon or the Consolations of the Holy  
 Ghost. But if, under a Conviction of Sin, he applies  
 to the Mediator, is willing to receive him, and submit  
 to him in all his Characters (which I apprehend is the  
 Case with this Person) then we may readily answer this  
 Question in the Affirmative, and support it by the fol-  
 lowing Considerations.*

1. *It is perfectly consistent with the Grace and Mercy of  
 God, that he should pardon the greatest Sinners, and visit  
 them too (if he pleases) with the Consolations of his Spi-*

*rit; therefore there is Ground of Hope.* The Grace of God is absolutely free in the Salvation of his People. When he chose them from Eternity, he viewed them in the Character of Rebels, unworthy therefore of his Favour, and deserving his everlasting Wrath: And when he comes to them in Time to apply Salvation, he finds them dead in Trespasses and Sins. *Free Grace* laid the *Foundation*; and *Free Grace* will finish the spiritual Building, and lay the *Top-Stone* thereof. When our Lord inquires of his Father, wherefore he had *revealed* the Mysteries of his Kingdom to such *Babes* as his Disciples, and had *hid them from the Wise and Prudent*, he says, *Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy Sight.* Matt. xi. 25. resolving it all into the free sovereign Pleasure of God. If then God is absolutely free in our Salvation, and does not refuse the Blessings of it in Consideration of the least Demerit or Unworthiness in us, then he may as well pardon the greatest Sinners, as those who have not run into such Excess of Riot: Especially, if we consider that God exalts the Riches of his Grace \* in our Salvation; nay, that this is the great End he has in View in the whole of our Salvation. None should now be discouraged at a View of the Greatness of their Sins, or question the Reality of those spiritual Enjoyments God has given them, because they are unworthy of them. The Riches of the Grace of God infinitely exceed all the Demerit of Sin, and triumph in the full Pardon of the most heinous Transgressions. Methinks, I see the awakened Sinner impressed with a deep Sense of his Vileness, and hear him objecting to his Pardon his great Unworthiness. But, O Soul! are you indeed exceeding vile? Are your Sins ex-

\* *Isai.* lv. 7. *Rom.* v. 17.

ceeding numerous, and attended with every Aggravation? Are you the unworthiest of Creatures? The more exceeding abundant then will the Grace of God appear in your Pardon, Comfort, and Salvation; the more will the great End he has in View in the Salvation of Sinners be answered, and the more Glory rebound to him. Under a View of this infinite, abundant Grace, you may sweetly encourage yourself, and say — “ ’Tis true, Lord, I am unworthy; nay, I would call myself the unworthiest of thy Creatures. But, oh! I would not, I even dare not distrust, and say, I am too great a Sinner for a God of so much Grace to pardon. Would not this, Lord, lessen the Riches of thy Mercy? Oh! if I am the greatest Sinner thou hast ever yet saved, I shall then be the Wonder of Heaven; I shall claim a Right above all my Fellow-Saints to adore the Riches of thy Grace; and thou, Lord, wilt be admired of all for thy Mercy manifested to a Creature so unworthy.”

2. *It is consistent with the Glory of all the Divine Perfections to pardon and comfort the greatest Sinners; therefore such have Ground for Hope.* If any Thing appears to forbid it, it is the Justice, the Holiness of God, &c. the Necessity of inflicting Punishment upon the Offender to secure the moral Government of God from any Stain or Abuse. Had there been no Mediator, no Surety, to stand in the Sinner's Stead, to make Satisfaction, and purchase spiritual and eternal Blessings; these would have stood as everlasting Obstructions to the Pardon and Salvation of the Sinner. But, as there is a Mediator provided; as this Mediator is God and Man; as he has in our Nature obeyed the Law, and bore the Punishment Sin deserved; as the Sacrifice he offered had an infinite Virtue in it, and so was accepted; so there is a

Way

Way open for the Bestowment of every saving Blessing, in a perfect Consistency with the Honour of the Law and the Law-giver; upon the Sinner, nay upon the greatest Sinner: For the Virtue of this infinitely atoning Sacrifice exceeds the utmost Malignity and Demerit of Sin. What glorious encouraging News should this be to every guilty Creature! Behold Mercy and Truth meeting together, Righteousness and Peace kissing each other, all being perfectly harmonious in the Salvation of the most unworthy! See Justice laying aside its awful Sword, and joining with Grace and Mercy in holding out the golden Sceptre? See the Law receiving the highest Honour by the Obedience of the Law-giver! See all the Demands of every Attribute of the Deity fully answered in Christ's Mediation; the Glory of each secured, and yet Encouragement given to the vilest Sinners to hope and seek for Salvation! Behold, *God is just, and yet the Justifier of them that believe in Jesus!* Rom. iii. 26. *He is faithful and just in the Forgiveness of Sins, and in cleansing from all Unrighteousness!* 1 John i. 9. And can you now despair of Salvation, or say, God cannot or will not visit you with the Consolations of his Spirit? Have you ever considered the Sacrifice that has been offered, its Appointment by the Father, its atoning Virtue, its perfect Acceptableness? And can you say, your Sins are too great to be forgiven? Have you applied, my dear, but doubting Friend, to Christ, as a suitable, all-sufficient Saviour, and been enabled to commit your Soul without Reserve into his Hands to be justified, sanctified, and eternally saved? Let me then tell you, God can be even just in pardoning your Sins, though never so great; and in comforting and saving your Soul, though never so unworthy. When we look upon our Unworthiness abstractedly from Christ, we are filled with sad Confusion: But, when we

we look to Jesus the Mediator, our Fears are scattered, and our Souls revived with the Hopes of a glorious Immortality. You don't question the Virtue of the Blood of Jesus, sure! *His Blood cleanseth from all Sin.* 1 John i. 7. God, considered absolutely in himself, would appear as a *consuming Fire* to us in our guilty Condition; his Justice and his Truth would make us tremble. But view him through this Mediator, and you see his Wrath appeased, his Countenance wearing a glorious Smile. You see Justice and Truth too on your Side, speaking even Peace to your troubled Conscience, and securing your Pardon and Salvation. O ye sensible and awakened Sinners, look upon a crucified Redeemer! View his bloody Agony in the Garden! See the mighty God hanging upon the Cross! And then rejoice and say, "Oh, there is Hope for us! We will not give up our Souls as lost; so long as the Blood of Christ has an infinite Virtue in it. We will humbly hope that God will pardon such Sinners as we are, though we deserve the lowest Hell, and wash our polluted Souls in that overflowing Fountain, that is set open for Sin and Uncleanness."

3. *If we ever find any Sense of Sin, any Humiliation for it, and any Desires after Salvation, in the Way God has determined to bestow it, we may conclude that there is Pardon and Salvation for us.* Some Persons are afraid they have committed the unpardonable Sin. Satan makes this awful Suggestion to their Minds; and they go under the distressing Apprehensions of it from Day to Day, and are ready to think all Ground of Hope is gone. But, whatever the unpardonable Sin is; without inquiring into its Nature, we may without Hesitation conclude, that we have not been guilty of it, if we find any humbling Sense of Sin, any Relentings for it, any Desires

Desires after Salvation, and any Willingness to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, as he is represented in the Gospel. For, here I would ask — How came you to have a humbling Sense of Sin? Whence are these Desires after Salvation? Whence this Subjection of Soul to Jesus Christ? Is not all this from the Spirit of God? A View of the threatening Law may terrify and alarm us: But it is the peculiar Work of the Spirit of God, bringing home the Gospel to our Hearts, that fills our Souls with Self-loathing, and draws out our Hearts in holy Longings after Communion with, and a Conformity to Christ. And wherefore does the Spirit of God do this? Is it not a plain Intimation that we have not sinned the unpardonable Sin? Is it not an Encouragement to us to hope that there is Salvation for us? Is it not a Token for good, that God will give us the Blessings we are desirous of enjoying? Some Convictions there may be, and often are, in those that perish. But would God shew us the Odiousness of Sin, would he humble us for it, and fill us with Desires after a Deliverance from it; would he shew us the Excellency of Jesus Christ, and make us willing to receive him in all his Characters; and then leave us to perish? Oh! No. You have his Promises\* to plead, ye thirsty Sinners. You have Christ's own Words† to encourage you, ye willing Souls. If you are willing, Christ is so too. Inquire then, has Christ your Will? Do you see a Beauty in him? and is your Soul drawn in Affection to him? This is an Assurance that he will pardon and save you, and give you all those Consolations by the Way, that he sees to be needful for you. The Greatness of your Sins will be no Objection to him.

\* Matt. v. 6. † John vi. 37.

4. *God has pardoned, comforted, and saved great Sinners.*—As God has graciously represented himself as a God pardoning Iniquity, Transgressions and Sins, that is, all Sorts of Sins; so he has done it in all Ages and Generations. Let us look into the Old Testament, and we shall find it furnishing us with many Instances. Thus *Lot* was guilty of *Drunkenness* and *Incest*. Gen. xix. 3, &c. *David* was chargeable with *Adultery* and *Murder*; and he was pardoned and comforted too. *Solomon* fell into *Idolatry*. *Manasseh* was guilty of such Abominations, as even exceeded those amongst the Heathens; yet he is made a Monument of Mercy. 2 Chron. xxxiii. And we have a most striking and remarkable Instance of rich distinguishing Grace in *Ephraim*. *Isai. lvii. 17, 18.* *For the Iniquity of his Covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth; and he went on forwardly in the Way of his Heart.* What could we expect to hear an offended God saying but this, Let him alone to receive the Fruit of his Doings? Shall I manifest my Grace to such an obstinate Rebel? He might have spoke in such awful Language as this. But behold the Grace of God, how astonishing! *I have seen his Ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and will restore Comforts to him and to his Mourners.* The timorous Soul may say, these are Instances under a dark Dispensation, and therefore come not up to the Case. Let us therefore now look into the New Testament. And here, the first Instance that strikes us is *Peter's* denying his Lord, and with dreadful Oaths and *Imprecations*. Matt. xxvi. 69, &c. Another Instance we have in *Saul* the Pharisee, who was a fiery Persecutor; a bold Blasphemer; and yet he obtained not only pardoning Mercy, but enjoyed much of the Consolations of the Holy Ghost: And he says of his Conversion, that it  
was

was a Pattern of what Christ would do in After-ages ; that is, that he would pardon and save the greatest Sinners. 1 *Tim.* i. 16. But we have all Sorts of Sinners mentioned amongst the sanctified *Corinthians*. 1 *Cor.* vi. 11. *Such were some of you* ; that is, some were *Fornicators* ; others *Idolaters* ; others *Adulterers* ; others *effeminate*, or of lascivious Tempers and Practices ; others *Abusers of themselves with Mankind*, or such as have been guilty of the detestable Sin of *Sodom* ; others *Thieves*, *Covetous*, *Drunkards*, *Revilers*, and *Extortioners* : But you are now the Triumph of rich and sovereign Grace, being *justified*, and in some Measure *sanctified* too. Thus we see that all Sorts of Sins, even the most unnatural, have been pardoned. And can you now say, my Friend, that yours are too great to be forgiven, or that God would not comfort such an unworthy Creature as you are ? Are there many peculiar Aggravations attending your Sins ? Were they committed after great Mercies and Deliverances ? So were *Lot's* and *Solomon's*. Have they been committed with great Deliberation ? So were *David's*. Have they been often repeated ? *Peter* repeated his three Times. In fine, all these Instances shew, that God can consistently pardon, nay, that he does pardon the greatest of Sinners, and favour them too with the Consolations of his Spirit. Sometimes indeed great Sinners have felt great Terrors ; but these have been often sweetly succeeded by great Joys. In the Life of *Col. Gardiner*, we read of the sore and long Distress he was under : But God was pleased, after some Time, to scatter the Cloud, to change the Scene, and to turn his bitter Cries into cheerful Praises. Thus we should not be discouraged at the Greatness of our Sins.



5. *That we may know whether those Consolations, with which we have been favoured, are the Consolations of the Spirit, we must inquire what Influence they had upon us.* You see God can, in a perfect Consistency with all his Perfections, bestow the Blessings of Salvation upon the unworthiest of his Creatures. That you may be more particularly satisfied about yourself, that those Consolations you have enjoyed came from God, look back to the Frame of Mind you was then in, and inquire what Influence they had upon you. If the Joys you felt made you careless, and left in you a greater Relish for Sin; if you can with greater Ease pursue the Lusts of the Flesh, the Lusts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life; then you have Reason to conclude that all was a Delusion. But, if you was humbly seeking after Salvation, when your Soul was thus set at Liberty; if the Joys you felt made Sin appear odious, endeared the Redeemer more; if you was more weaned from the World, filled with Admiration at a View of distinguishing Grace, and was put more upon Prayer and other Means towards promoting the Power and Life of Religion in your Heart; then you may conclude that God has been comforting your Soul with those Consolations, with which he comforts his People; and consequently, that you have no Reason to be discouraged at a View of the Greatness of your Sins, as if they were effectual Obstructions to the Manifestations of pardoning and saving Grace. — Having thus endeavoured to answer the first Question, I now proceed to the second:

II. *Whether one, who has been a great Sinner, but has been enabled to apply to Jesus for Salvation, may partake of all the Ordinances of the Lord? This is a Question easy to be answered. If the Greatness of our Sins does*  
not

not exclude us from pardoning Mercy, it does not exclude us from the Ordinances of God. If through Grace we have an Interest in, and a Title to the Glories of an eternal World, then we may by the same Grace claim a Right to all the Privileges of God's House here. If you was not *baptized* in your Infancy, it is certainly your Duty now, that so you may publicly enlist yourself under the Banner of the *mighty God*. As to the Ordinance of the *Lord's Supper*; if you have been humbled for Sin, and desire to be delivered from it; if you have been enabled to give up yourself to Jesus; if you desire to love him more, and to grow in a Conformity to his Image, and would wait upon Christ in all Ordinances, that these Ends may be answered; it is then your Duty to come to the Table of our Lord; and you may do it with a comfortable Expectation of the Blessing and Presence of Christ to make the Ordinance effectual to strengthen every Grace of the Spirit in you, and to train you up more and more for the heavenly Inheritance. You are not to consider the Greatness of your Sins, when you are inquiring whether it is your Duty to wait upon Christ in this Ordinance; but to consider the Frame and Temper of your Mind, the Ends you have in View, and the Principles from whence you act. These are to determine your Duty, and not your Unworthiness. Permit me then to call you to an Examination. You have been a great Sinner: And have you been humbled upon this Account? Are you filled with Shame and Self-Abhorrence? Have you in the Frame of the prodigal Son thrown yourself before an offended God, saying with him — “*Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy Sight,*”

“*and am no more worthy to be called thy Son?* Oh, No!

“ 'Tis

" 'Tis more, Lord, than I deserve, to be treated as an  
 " hired Servant. I deserve to be banished for ever to  
 " the infernal Regions : But, Lord, stretch out thine  
 " Hand, pluck me as a Brand out of the Burning,  
 " take me into thy Family, and let me not perish for  
 " ever. I am loathsome ; but do thou *clothe me with*  
 " *Change of Raiment, that the Shame of my Nakedness*  
 " *do not appear.* I am unclean ; but do thou wash me  
 " in that *Fountain set open.* Lord ! I would be thine,  
 " Adorable Mediator ! I would love thee. Behold !  
 " here I give up myself entirely unto thee. But I am  
 " not indeed worthy of thine Acceptance ; for, Lord,  
 " thou must do all for me and in me. Yet, as I have  
 " thy Promise, on that I lean for my Encouragement."—  
 Is not this your Case, my Friend ? Have you been thus  
 enabled to come to Jesus ? You have then a Right to  
 all the Ordinances of the Lord. Come humbly, under  
 a Sense of your Unworthiness of the Divine Favour.  
 Yet come chearfully, casting yourself upon the Lord,  
 expecting that, in waiting upon him, he will fulfil his  
 Promises of Grace in your complete and everlasting Sal-  
 vation—Having thus answered these two Questions, I  
 would close with three Reflections.

1. Hence we learn, *that, of all the Works of God,*  
*those of our Redemption and Salvation by Jesus Christ are*  
*the most glorious.* In the Creation God has mani-  
 fested his Wisdom, Power, and Goodness : But here  
 you see the manifold Wisdom of God ; here you  
 see the Riches of his Grace. When we consider the  
 Character of those who are saved, what the Blessings  
 of Salvation are, and the Method which God took to  
 secure these Blessings, we cannot but be filled with the  
 highest Wonder. What Heighths, what Depths of  
 Wisdom and Love, that God will pardon and save Re-

G

bels !



bels! that he has formed a Plan for doing this in a Con-  
 sistency with his Justice and Holiness! — “Whilst others  
 “are viewing the various Phenomena of Nature, O  
 “my Soul, let me behold this Mystery of Divine  
 “Grace! Let me see an *incarnate God*, and view the  
 “*King of Glory* stooping to take upon him the Form  
 “of a Servant, to obey and suffer in the Room of guilty  
 “Rebels! Let me see, in Consequence of this, Grace  
 “displaying itself in the Salvation of Sinners, conquer-  
 “ing hard Hearts, pardoning the greatest Transgres-  
 “sors, plucking Brands out of the Burning, and raising  
 “the vilest Creatures from a State of Dishonour, Dis-  
 “tress, and Misery, to be Kings and Priests unto  
 “God!” — Oh, what Entertainment, what Pleasure  
 must this give to a rational Mind! It is the Song of  
 the Saints above, the Admiration of Creatures arrived  
 to a State of the utmost Perfection. They are for ever  
 employed in searching into and admiring the Mysteries  
 of the Grace of God: And shall not we esteem them  
 fit Subjects of our Contemplation here? Oh, the Blind-  
 ness and Stupidity of those, who see no Beauty, no Glory  
 in the Scheme of Salvation!

2. Hence we learn, *that none should despair of Salva-*  
*tion, because of the Greatness of their Sins.* There is a  
 secret Despair which lies in the Breast of the Sinner,  
 and slays its thousands, yea, its ten thousands. When  
 any Conviction is made upon the Mind, it is immedi-  
 ately suggested to the poor Sinner, that it is in vain for  
 him to hope for Mercy; his Sins have been attended  
 with such aggravating Circumstances, that no Pardon  
 will be granted. Besides, the Difficulties of the divine  
 Life are so great, that he can never expect to surmount  
 them. He may as well therefore continue his present  
 Pursuits, and enjoy as much Pleasure as he can, and  
 give

give up all Thoughts of being a Christian. With these Suggestions the Sinner stifles every Conviction, and eagerly pursues sensual Gratifications, leaving the awful Consequence. Is this the Case with any of you? You may immediately conclude that it is an Invention of Satan, to secure you the more under his Power. Your Sins are not too great to be forgiven; nor are the Difficulties of the Christian Life insurmountable to those that depend upon the Strength of Christ. Many have been pardoned, who have been as vile as you: Therefore do not despair, and so continue in Sin. Oh, that I could convince you, Sinner! I would use all possible Means. I would endeavour to set before you all the Riches of the Grace of God, take you to the Cross of Christ, and shew you an infinite Sacrifice. I would present you with a long Catalogue of first-rate Sinners, pardoned and saved. Do not entertain the dangerous Thought then, that there is no Mercy for you; but attend to the important Convictions made at any Time on your Mind, and look to Jesus to justify and save you.

3. *Though what has been said tends to encourage every Sinner to look to Jesus for Salvation, yet it encourages none to continue in Sin. They that from hence say, Let us sin, that Grace may abound, are in the Gall of Bitterness, and in the Bond of Iniquity. There is no Mercy, no Salvation for those that continue in Sin. He that covereth his Sins, shall not prosper: But whose confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have Mercy. Prov. xxviii. 13.*

## C A S E VII.

*What Judgment should that Person pass upon himself, who knows himself to be in a dark and corrupt Frame, but finds himself greatly unaffected with it, and stupid under it?*

THIS very interesting and important Question is taken into Consideration in Consequence of the following Letter; which, though it be very long, yet will not be found tedious to those who have experienced any Variety in the Christian Life; because the whole of it is so spiritual and experimental. It runs to this Effect:

Sir,

“ HAVING long walked uncomfortably, and apprehending my Case to be different from the common Experience of the People of God under their Darkneses and Doubts, I would desire your Judgment and Advice upon it. I know it is no uncommon Thing for those who are renewed by Grace to complain of indwelling Sin, of the Strength of their Corruptions, of the Weakness of their Graces, of the Hidings of God’s Face, and of distressing Doubts and Fears upon these Accounts. But, in the midst of all, there is Love to God, and Desires after him, which are manifested by their earnest seeking of him; as the Church says: *The Desire of our Soul is to thy Name; and to the Remembrance of thee. With my Soul have I desired thee in the Night, &c.* Isai. xxvi. 8, 9. Christ is precious to them: And, “ could

“ could you assure them of their Interest in him, they  
“ would rejoice and be comforted ; as knowing that  
“ in him they should have, all they want, Wisdom,  
“ Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. But  
“ it is not so with me.

“ My Heart, alas ! is alienated from God, back-  
“ ward and contrary to the Exercises of Religion. I  
“ have lost all Delight in spiritual Things. I cannot  
“ call the Sabbath a Delight, nor attend to any  
“ Ordinance with Pleasure. Very different is my Cha-  
“ racter from what is described Psalm i. 2. *His De-*  
“ *light is in the Law of the Lord ; and in his Law doth he*  
“ *meditate. Day and Night.* And as different must be  
“ my Language from what the Psalmist uses Psal. cxix.  
“ 97. *O how love I thy Law ! &c.* Those Words in  
“ Isai. liii. 2. *He hath no Form nor Comeliness, &c.*  
“ seem more like the Language of my Heart and Ways ;  
“ and God may complain of me, as in Hos. viii. 12.

“ When I bow before the LORD in secret, it is with  
“ a servile Temper ; not thankful, as enjoying a Privi-  
“ lege ; but from a Sense of absolute Necessity, being  
“ convinced of my Need of Mercy.

“ When I am not altogether in a stupid, dull, indo-  
“ lent Frame, I bewail before him the wretched Depra-  
“ vity of my Nature, and the dreadful Effects of it  
“ through the whole Man, appearing in Pride, Unbelief,  
“ Neglect of God, and the like. But I am more affected  
“ with these Things as my Misery, than as my Sin ; and  
“ therefore fear, I do not come to Christ, as those do,  
“ who are drawn by the Father.

“ I set my Name to that Inventory, *Wretched and misfe-*  
“ *rable, and poor, and blind, and naked :* Rev. iii. 17. And  
“ one would think, where there is a Sense of these  
“ Things, the kind, condescending, and encouraging

“ Language in the next Words should excite some  
 “ Sense of Gratitude, in the Exercise of which would  
 “ be some Delight. But it is far otherwise in my Expe-  
 “ rience. ’Tis true, I cannot but acknowledge that  
 “ the Saviour God has appointed, and the Method of  
 “ Salvation he has established, do exactly suit my mise-  
 “ rable and helpless Condition; and it is owing to the  
 “ free, unconditional Promises and Invitations of the  
 “ Gospel, that any Hope is kept alive in my Soul: (But  
 “ you know that Hope deferred makes the Heart sick.)  
 “ In the Exercise of this free Hope I can sometimes  
 “ plead with God, that, if I am to this Day wholly  
 “ under the Power of a carnal Mind, he can by the  
 “ Exercise of his sovereign Grace renew and save me,  
 “ consistently with all the glorious Perfections of his  
 “ Nature; yet the Lord knows how unaffected I am  
 “ with, and how unthankful for, these Encouragements.

“ If I look back to past Experience, when I walked  
 “ more comfortably, I remember the Jealousies, which  
 “ then arose in my Mind; doubting that I did not in  
 “ Reality love Christ above all, and give the Preference  
 “ to spiritual and heavenly Things.


“ As these Doubts arose from what I found working  
 “ within, so a Reflection on my outward Conversa-  
 “ tion tends to confirm them; while I judge by this  
 “ Rule, *Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth*  
 “ *speaketh.* For I know of no Duty in the Christian  
 “ Life, which I have more neglected, than speaking of  
 “ the Things of God; partly, through the Reserved-  
 “ ness of my natural Temper; but chiefly, through a  
 “ Want of being suitably impressed with a Sense of  
 “ those great, glorious, and gracious Discoveries he  
 “ has made in his Word.

“ Since



“ Since this Night of inward Darkneſs I have been  
 “ viſited once and again with bereaving Providences;  
 “ and I find that under theſe my Affections are work-  
 “ ing ſtrongly after the Creatures, though but very  
 “ faintly after God. But, in the miſt of all, I have  
 “ many and great Mercies, yet, for Want of Thank-  
 “ fulneſs, I loſe the Enjoyment of them. You will  
 “ eaſily allow, that the Caſe of one, who can neither  
 “ look to Earth or Heaven, within or without, with  
 “ any Comfort or Pleaſure, muſt be very diſtreſſing.  
 “ If for a few Minutes I find the Preſſure of inward  
 “ Troubles a little lightened, the Weight of outward  
 “ ones preſſes in, and keeps down my Spirits; and ſo  
 “ the Clouds are ſtill gathering, and God’s Anger is  
 “ not turned away, but his Hand is ſtretched out ſtill,

“ I think I have taken Care, in repreſenting my Caſe,  
 “ not to exceed on the dark Side, which perhaps Per-  
 “ ſons under Darkneſs may be apt to do. And now,  
 “ Sir, I aſk, Should the Lord call me out of this  
 “ World in my preſent Condition, can you ſee any  
 “ Room to hope that I ſhould be made a Partaker of  
 “ the Inheritance of the Saints in Light? Oh, that  
 “ the Lord, who perfectly knows the State of my Caſe,  
 “ and how far my true Character is drawn in theſe  
 “ Lines, would give you a diſcerning Judgment into  
 “ this important Affair!”

 **T**HUS you have the Caſe drawn out at large  
 in a Train of Experiences, which is com-  
 prized, in a compendious Way, in the Que-  
 ſtion now under Conſideration. And, after  
 you have read over and reviewed this Caſe attentively,  
 I will now venture to appeal to you, if you have had  
 any conſiderable Experience of that Variety which is in

the Christian Life, whether this Case is so peculiar or uncommon, as our Friend imagines. So far from it, that I am verily persuaded, from my own Experience, and the various Observations I have made upon the Experience of others; that the far greater Number of true Believers can adopt almost every Particular of these Complaints to themselves at Seasons. When our Friend intimates, that he apprehends his Case to be different from the common Experience of God's People; though his Thoughts are in some Measure just, yet he evidently magnifies the Workings of Grace in others, and diminishes them as to himself. But remember, my dear Friend, if you were to enter into serious Conversation with those complaining Believers, whose spiritual Love and Desire you speak so strongly of, you would find them absolutely unwilling to allow the whole true concerning themselves, and making the same Complaints with you; and in their Conversation you would find them as ready to think and speak favourably of you, as you are to think and speak favourably of them.

This Spirit of *complaining Modesty* is too common among Christians in the present Day; although there is something of that amiable Disposition in it, of esteeming each other better than themselves. Do you think their Case better than yours? Go to them, and enter into free spiritual Discourse, and you will find them thinking your Case better than theirs. Every Heart knows its own Bitterness, and is too ready to magnify it. But you have no more Reason to discourage your Soul, because you think you see that Grace working in them, which you cannot observe in yourself; than they have to discourage themselves; because they observe that Grace working under your Complaints, which they do not see in themselves. Don't say, your Case is peculiar  
and

and uncommon; for you may take it for granted, that most other complaining Christians conceive theirs to be peculiar likewise.

Having thus prepared the Way to prevent such Soul-sinking Thoughts, I would do these *three* Things:

I. I would go through the Particulars contained in this Case distinctly:

II. Give my Opinion upon the whole taken together in one View: And then,

III. Conclude with a few Words of Advice. — And Oh that the Spirit of God might set it home upon the Hearts of all those, who make the same Complaints, and are under the same Distresses and Doubts.

I. The *particular Complaints contained in this Letter* are numerous, but may be all comprized under the following Heads, in the Order the Letter places them.

1. As to your *religious Duties*. You complain that you are backward to them, can take no Delight in them, and can see nothing of the Beauty of Christ through them. This is, doubtless, a very melancholy Frame of Soul, and such as calls for deep Humiliation. But don't think, that it is a Complaint which the Children of God are Strangers to. The best of Believers are, at Seasons, in a carnal, dull, and stupid Frame of Spirit. But then they cannot be satisfied with it, nor properly contented under it: They are out of their Element, while thus out of Frame for spiritual Duties. And is not this your Case? If it be, let me assure you, that while this spiritual Disorder proves the Badness of your Frame, your Uneasiness under it, and Dissatisfaction with it, is a promising Indication of the Renewal of your Nature; and of the Safety of your State. I doubt not,  
but

but you do really dislike these Frames of Soul, and from the very Bottom of your Heart desire to be delivered from them, and to have a spiritual Delight in divine Ordinances restored to your Soul, and to see God's Glory, as you have seen it in the Sanctuary. Though you cannot take Pleasure in divine Ordinances; yet you desire it: Though you cannot see the Beauty of Christ in them; yet you say, *I desire to see Jesus*. And if this be a just Description of the Bias and Tendency of your Soul, then it must be said, that still *the Desire of your Soul is to his Name, and the Remembrance of him*.

2. As to your *secret Devotions and Supplications*. You complain that they are performed with a servile Spirit, not as enjoying a Privilege, but as driven by absolute Necessity. Bless God, that he, by the Spirit of Conviction, and by an intimate Knowledge of yourself, drives you to a Throne of Grace. 'Tis a Sign you are not quite lifeless, ignorant, stupid, or prayerless. It is a Mercy you can at any Time plead with God for spiritual Blessings, and can wrestle with him, as one in a necessitous, helpless Condition. And it is evident you are not entirely destitute of all Encouragement, or devoid of all the Drawings of the Father; because you are directed to a *Throne of Grace*. Don't call this a Disposition *merely servile*; because, though Necessity drives you, yet some Glimmerings of free Grace invite you. 'Tis true, we ought always to esteem it an invaluable Privilege to be admitted to the Mercy-Seat of the Lord. But what is it that makes it a Privilege? 'Tis principally this; because the Necessity of our Case, and the Helplessness of our Condition, requires it. And when you go to God in Christ under a Sense of your absolute Need, you really go to embrace a Privilege; as the Manslayer fled to the City of Refuge, accounting it

it a great Mercy that he has such a City to fly to. Endeavour therefore to learn the Value of the Privilege from the Feeling you have of your Need, since the real Value of it will be heightened; by so much the more as your Condition is necessitous.

3. As to your *occasional Awakenings out of your wonted Stupidity*. Under these you bewail the Depravity of your Nature, and the sad Effects of it; but complain that you bewail these Things rather as your *Misery*, than as your *Sin*. But let me ask, what is it that makes your Depravity, and its Effects, in Pride, Unbelief, Neglect of God, and the like, to be esteemed your Misery? Your *Pride* would be your *Pleasure*, your *Unbelief* would be your *Boast*, your *Neglect* of God would be your *Ease* and *Content*, if you had not some real Sight and Sense of their Sinfulness. Can the Depravity of Nature be a Misery to one that does not see the Sinfulness of it? Can Pride be a Burden to him, who does not see the Shamefulness of it? Can Unbelief be a Grief to one who does not see the Unreasonableness of it? Can Neglect of God be an Unhappiness to him, who does not see the Fault of it? Surely, no. Whenever such Things as these are felt as Miseries, it is because they are seen as Sins. 'Tis this Sight that lies at the Bottom of these Complaints, and makes them to be so burdensome and disagreeable.

4. As to *Gospel-Encouragements*. You complain that, notwithstanding you see yourself wretched and miserable, yet you are sadly unaffected with them, and unthankful for them. This is indeed a sad Evidence of the Weakness or Inactivity of Faith. But you yourself have given a very sufficient Reason, why you do not feel yourself sufficiently thankful for these glorious and encouraging

couraging Invitations, by hinting that *Hope deferred makes the Heart sick.*

And are you become thus sick at Heart, because of the deferring of your Hope? Remember, this is no other than what the Spouse in the Canticles calls her *being sick of Love*. Cant. v. 8. Which is a very peculiar Experience: For, generally speaking, as Faith increases or decreases in its Exercise, so does every other Grace. But this is a Case, wherein *Love*, as working in Desire, is strong; but *Faith* is weak, and ready to fail. And can you wonder, that you should feel no lively Thankfulness in your Soul for these Gospel-Promises, when every one knows that it must be a high Degree of Faith, which can enable a Person to be sensibly thankful for a bare Promise, while the Fulfilment of the Promise is delayed, and the Soul is groaning and sinking for Want of the Blessings promised.

5. As to your *past Experiences*. You mention, that, when you reflected upon them, you had, even at the best of Times, a Jealousy in your Mind, lest the whole was no more than a superficial Work; that it was not sufficiently deep and spiritual. From hence you seem to conclude, that these Jealousies arose from the faithful Monitions of the Spirit of God; and so they intimate, all was not right between God and your Soul, even when you walked more comfortably than now. But give me leave to draw another Conclusion from the same Observation. This Experience seems to intimate, that, even then you was jealous over yourself with a godly Jealousy: And these Suspicions in your Soul are so far from being Indications that the Work in your Heart was superficial; that their being attended with this holy Jealousy is a Circumstance which makes them more likely to be true and saving. And if you did then, and  
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can now, beg of God seriously and sincerely, that he would search you, and see if there be any wicked Way in you, you have great Reason to hope that both your past and present Experiences have something of a true Work of Grace included in them.

6. As to your *present Conduct and Conversation*. You remark that a Reflection upon this tends to confirm your former Jealousies. But why? Do you live voluntarily in the Commission of any known Sin? Do you allow yourself in the constant Neglect of any known Duty? Or are you practising any secret Iniquity, industriously hiding it from the Eyes of the World, when you know you cannot hide it from the omniscient Eye of God? If either of these is the Case with you, then indeed you have abundant Reason to suspect yourself to be no better than a painted Hypocrite.

But what you mention is something of a quite different Nature. You cannot speak so freely of the Things of God, as you ought; and would, if you were suitably impressed with a Sense of the great Things of God. This Neglect you own arises *in Part* from a Reservedness in your natural Temper, for which gracious Allowances are made; and, upon the whole, you are sensible of, complain under, and strive against this Defect. Surely then, nothing can be gathered from hence to confirm your Jealousies concerning your State; but it only proves that the Frame of your Soul is not so spiritual and lively, as it ought to be; which affords Matter for Lamentation and Excitement, but not for Jealousy and Discouragement.

7. As to the *bereaving and merciful Providences you have been visited with*. You complain that the former do not appear to wean you from the Creature, and that the latter do not promote a Spirit of Gratitude. This

This again is another Experience that calls for deep Humiliation of Soul. But, if serious Persons ought to be continually questioning their State, because Providences are not so sanctified to them as they desire or expect, we must all give up our Hope. The purifying Effect of afflictive Providences is often undiscerned for a considerable Time; and the endearing Effect of merciful Providences is often prevented for the present, by Reason of their being accompanied with inward or outward Troubles; as is evidently your Case.

Thus I have offered a few Thoughts, freely and briefly, upon the Particulars of Complaint in this Epistle; and now proceed,

II. To give my Opinion upon the whole taken together in one View; which shall be done in the few short Hints following.

I conceive that the whole Strain of these experimental Complaints intimates,

1. That you have really fallen into that, which you seem so cautious against; namely, of exceeding on the dark Side; setting forth the worst of the Case, without attending to or observing what Groanings, that cannot be uttered, are working under these Complaints.

2. That the Lord has given you Eyes to look into yourself, to attend to the experimental Part of Religion; as one that cannot be contented with the Form of it; and so are well skilled in the Duty of Self-Examination. But O that you had the Art of improving what you find in yourself, not to discourage or sink you, but to quicken, animate, and encourage you to fly to and depend upon Christ for Grace and Righteousness.

3. That, in the midst of all these Complaints, there is a real Desire in your Soul after Gospel-Holiness and Gospel-Comfort. And though your Frame is so dark,  
your



your Heart so fearful, your Soul so corrupted, and your Affections so stupid, yet there is a Love to Christ and Holiness in your Soul; only the Delight and Pleasure of this spiritual Love is suspended or suppressed by the Power of these heavy Complaints. And, if so, you exactly answer the Character of those whom Christ has pronounced blessed, *Matt. v. 3—6.*

4. That all the fundamental Graces of the Spirit are not only wrought in you, but are really *dwelling* under and against these spiritual Disorders. 'Tis the Principle of *Faith* that makes Unbelief your Burden. 'Tis the Principle of *Hope* that struggles with your Fears. 'Tis the Principle of *Love* that makes your Stupidity your Complaint. 'Tis the Principle of *Humility* that makes your Pride your Abhorrence. And it is a latent Principle of *Gratitude* which makes you see and lament the Power of Ingratitude in your Soul. The deeper your Distress is upon the Account of these spiritual Diseases, the stronger is the Evidence of your having some Principles in your Heart, which are opposite to these inward Corruptions.

III. I come now to conclude with a few Words of Advice.

Don't aim at getting Ease under the Power of these Soul-Maladies, so as to be in any Danger of resting contented in your present sad Frame of Spirit; but be concerned to come out of it, and be delivered from it. And, in order to this, go on in the Way that you have mentioned and taken: *Subscribing* yourself wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: *Acknowledging* that the Method of Salvation by Christ exactly suits your necessitous Case: *Intreating* God, upon the Footing of his free, sovereign, and powerful Grace, that, if you are still in the Gall of Bitterness,

ness, he would renew and sanctify you: *Encouraging* yourself before him with this Thought, that he can renew, pardon, and save your Soul in a full Consistency with all the Perfections of his Nature: And *pleading* with him, that he could glorify himself more by saving, than condemning you; more by delivering you out of this sad Frame, than leaving you in it; more by giving you his quickening and enlivening Grace, than by suffering you to remain in such a stupid, corrupt, and carnal Frame. With these Arguments you may fill your Mouth, and encourage your Heart before the Lord.

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C A S E VIII.

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*How may the Times of Family and Closet Duty be best regulated to the Glory of God, our own Comfort, and the Advantage of those about us ?*

This Question was sent me with the following Letter :


*Reverend Sir,*

“ THE Consideration of your Answer to the Question on the thirteenth of *November*, has renewed some Difficulties I have often had on my Mind, with Respect to the Times of Family and Closet Religion. You there remarked, that Evening Clubs and Visits, so frequent amongst Professors in the present Day, are greatly injurious to the divine Life. Now, as it is our Duty to make Religion appear amiable to all about us, and particularly to our Families ; and as a regular, uniform Practice of Religion may have a Tendency to engage those about us at least to pay a Reverence to that, which perhaps before they despised ; may not the frequent breaking through the Times of Family Religion bring a Reproach upon it in the Eyes of our Children and Servants, and the Performance of it sometimes at one Season, sometimes at another, make them imagine Religion to be only a Work by the by ? And yet, on the other hand, many unexpected Circumstances turn up, and often oblige us to omit it, when perhaps it is the proper Season, and to put it off to the last Hour of the Day, a Time when we are in general unfit for the Service

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“ of God. As to the Religion of the Closet, glad  
 “ should I be always to have it performed when in the  
 “ best Frame of Mind, which cannot be when we are  
 “ drowsy through the Fatigues of the Day: But, alas!  
 “ this has been too much my Case. To prevent this,  
 “ I have sometimes thought, I have now some Time,  
 “ and therefore will improve it; yet, through the Bu-  
 “ siness and Occurrences of the Day, my Thoughts  
 “ have been far from being composed, and I have  
 “ been in a Suspense, whether to perform Duty or  
 “ not. I have therefore sent you the above Question,  
 “ hoping an Answer to it may give me Satisfaction as  
 “ to the Path in which I should walk.”

 HIS is a Subject of great Importance, which  
 calls for our Consideration. Oh, may we  
 be enabled to attend to it with the utmost  
 Seriousness, and with a full Determination,  
 through divine Grace, to pursue every Conviction that  
 may be made upon our Minds concerning our Duty!  
 That I may answer this Question so as may not only  
 be suitable to this particular Person, but also to all those  
 who trifle with these sacred Duties, I would throw my  
 Thoughts into the following Method:

*I. Family and Closet Religion, Morning and Evening,  
 are every Way becoming the Christian Character, and are  
 necessary and important Branches of Christian Duty. There  
 is certainly no Impropriety in these Duties, but rather  
 an entire Suitableness to the Profession we make. They  
 shew the Christian to be all of a Piece: And Uniformity  
 in one of that sacred Character, how ornamental, how  
 adorning! Some have all the public Appearances of  
 zealous, active, and growing Christians: They plead for  
 Christ, and testify their Love to him at his Table. But  
 look*

look into their Families, and you can see nothing that favours of real Religion. What an Inconsistency is here ! *Joshua* resolved, that *he and his House should serve the Lord\**. And *Abraham* had a Mark of Commendation put upon him by God himself for his Care and Diligence, to teach his Children and his Household the Way of the Lord†. Family Prayer may not be essential to the Christian ; but it is no Honour to Heads of Families professing Godliness, to have it said they have no Religion in their Houses. Some, not willing wholly to omit it, attend to it on the Lord's Day ; others, every Evening. But is this filling up the Character of a Christian, a Head of a Family ? Is there not as great a Necessity for Worship, and as great a Beauty in it, in the Morning, as in the Evening ? Is it not a more comfortable Thing to pray for Preservation from Sin in a Morning, than to confess those Faults, we have fallen into for Want of it, in the Evening ? 'Twas a Practice our Forefathers were found in ; a Practice, I may say, necessary to our being flourishing Christians : 'Tis a Practice which God has for all Ages set his Seal to, by blessing those Persons and Families, who have seriously attended to it. — As to Closet Religion, I persuade myself, no professing Christians can object to it, though too many such neglect it ; and therefore their Souls must be in a starving Condition. We cannot be thriving Christians, and be but little with God in secret. 'Tis here that we meet with God, as well as in public Ordinances, and that he carries on his Work in our Souls, gives us Communion with himself, and trains us up for Glory. —

II. *Family and Closet Religion should be performed in such a Manner, and at such Seasons, as may tend most to*

\* *Josh.* xiv. 15. † *Gen.* xviii. 19.

*honour God, and promote the Good of Souls.* We should not therefore pray, or read the Scriptures, in a slothful, indifferent Manner, as if these were Duties of no Importance. This is teaching our Children and Servants to look upon them as trifling, and therefore as what may be either performed or not. We should not attend upon Family Duties in Haste, or hurry them over, as if we wanted to be gone, or thought them a Burden: Nor should we perform them at unseasonable Times, when it is most unlikely that God should be honoured, or our Souls profited. We should attend with the utmost Seriousness, pray with great Affection, great Reverence, and Importunity of Soul, that we may strike the Minds of those about us with an Awe of God, convince them of the Excellency of real Religion, and bring them to an Esteem for sacred Things. We should attend likewise at those Times, when the great Ends of these Duties are most likely to be answered. Thus, in the Closet, we should not think it enough just to mention a few Things in Prayer in a lifeless Manner, or, as a Parrot talks, by Rote, and then hurry away again, as if the Duty was over; nor should we chuse those Times, when we cannot attend to Duty as we ought. We should endeavour to enter upon Closet Duties in the most serious Frame, and, in general, aim to have so much Time, as to read a Portion of God's Word, think it over in our own Minds, take a View of our own Hearts, and then seek the Lord by Prayer and Supplication. In thus attending to these Duties, we may hope for the Presence and Blessing of God to make them useful to our own Souls, and the Souls of our Families.

III. *We should not wait till we find ourselves in a lively desirous Frame, before we enter upon these Duties.* The Person who sent us this Case, says, when he has had  
Time

Time to attend to Closet Worship, he has often found himself out of Frame, and so has been under a Difficulty, whether to engage in that Duty or not. — To guide us herein, we may observe — *If we are not to wait upon God, till we find our Souls in a suitable Frame, we may not wait upon him at all.* — For Instance — Suppose, with Regard to Closet Duty, in the Afternoon you have an Opportunity for it, but you find your Soul out of Tune; the World crouds into your Mind, and unfits you for waiting upon God; or some Difficulties you have met with perplex your Thoughts; or you find a sad Slothfulness and Drowsiness of Soul. On this Account you wait till the Close of the Day, hoping it will then be better with you: But alas! it is much the same; nay, perhaps you find it worse with you: the Hour of Rest is almost come, and feeble Nature wants some Refreshment. Must you omit the Duty now, because you find your Soul still out of Frame? For the same Reason you may put it off from Day to Day, and so live in the total Neglect of it. If we are indisposed for Duty, yet, if we apprehend this the most suitable Opportunity we shall have for Closet Duties, let us embrace it. Let us call upon our Souls to awake; let us read the Word of God, and proceed to Prayer: Before the Duty is over, our Souls may be better; our Affections may be enlivened; our hard Hearts may be softened; we may feel the powerful Influences of the Love of Jesus, and may rise from our Knees quickened and strengthened. In fine, if we wait for a good Frame, we may neglect all Duty, even public Worship. Not that we are to encourage Slothfulness, grow careless about the Temper of our Minds, and rush into the Presence of God without Seriousness. We should take some Pains with our cold, frozen, and wandering Hearts, before we enter upon public or private

vate Duties, and consider what we are going about. An Attempt in some such Manner as this may be a Means of raising our Attention, and of filling our Souls with a peculiar Solemnity — “ I am going, O my Soul, to be  
 “ the Mouth of my Family to God, to read his Word,  
 “ and to go before them in religious Duties: But oh,  
 “ why this trifling sleepy Frame? Consider what thou  
 “ art going about, and let me be upon my Watch, lest my  
 “ Family should see any Thing in my Spirit or Behavi-  
 “ our, that may give them a Dislike to any Part of  
 “ Religion. Lord, do thou warm my Heart, that with  
 “ lively Affection I may seek thee for my dear Children  
 “ and Servants, may mourn over their Sins, and com-  
 “ mit them to thy Grace and Protection, that they  
 “ may be satisfied of the Reality of Religion, and that  
 “ I have a true Concern for their immortal Souls.” —  
 Or, if you are entering upon Closet Duties, endeavour to get your Minds composed. With some Degree of Solemnity say to your Souls — “ I am going to separate  
 “ a few Moments from the World, and engage in the  
 “ Worship of the Closet. But, O my Heart! why so  
 “ cold? Why this Indifference? Come, O my Soul!  
 “ let thy Loins be girt, and thy Lights burning: Who  
 “ knows but I may meet with my Lord? He may fa-  
 “ vour me with his gracious Presence, and I may find  
 “ it to be a pleasant Hour. Away then these trifling  
 “ Thoughts. Where is my Faith, my Zeal, my  
 “ Love?” — Thus, as we should not wait for a suitable Frame, so we should not rush boldly upon Duties, but labour to get our Minds freed from Dullness and Distrac-  
 tions, and filled with that Seriousness of Spirit, that is suited to the solemn Duties we are called to.

IV. *As there is no particular Hour appointed in the Word of God for Family and Closet Religion, so we must attend*



*attend to these Duties at those Seasons, that we judge are most suited to the Conveniences of both, and to answer the Ends for which they are calculated.* As to the Time or Hour of Family Prayer, it is a prudential Thing, and should be suited to the Circumstances of Families, that we may make this Part of Religion as easy as possible, that so those under our Care may not esteem it burdensome, and attend upon it grudgingly. If a Master exercises a sovereign Authority in this Case, and determines the Time, without consulting what may be most suitable to the Family, he may by such Imprudence prejudice the Minds of some of his Family against him, and against that Worship that is of so much Importance. As much depends upon a Person's Prudence, so let me give you the following Directions :

1. *Look upon it as a Matter of great Concern to have Family and Closet Religion suitably attended to.* In the one your Families are concerned; in the other your own Souls. Don't treat these Things therefore as trifling Matters, but as what deserve much Study, Care, and Thought, to perform in a Manner that may be useful to those who are to join with you, win upon the Minds of your Children and Servants, and convince them that there is a Reality and Importance in Religion. And as to Closet Religion, the Prosperity of your own Souls is concerned. If you are negligent or careless here, you are like to go on in a customary lifeless Manner, and not get one Step forward to Appearance in your Way to Heaven. It requires therefore your serious Consideration, how and when to perform these Duties, so as may answer the most valuable Purposes.

2. *Carry the Matter to God by Prayer for Direction.* In all Circumstances we should look up to God, especially in those Affairs wherein his Glory is most evidently

concerned. This Affair calls for a great Measure of Prudence, Serioufness, Faithfulness, and Resolution; therefore you should be often looking up to him for Guidance, and for every Thing that is necessary towards the profitably discharging the Duties of the Family and the Closet. Beg of God, that he would impress you with a Sense of the Importance of these Duties to your Family and to your own Souls; that he would enable you to have his Glory in View in them; and that he would make you desirous of attending to them in such a Manner, and at such Seasons, as may answer some great and valuable Ends to those that join with you in them. In thus doing you may expect the Blessing of God upon you, and all that Direction he has promised\*, and that is suitable to your particular Difficulties.

3. *As there is no particular Direction or Command in the Word of God as to the Hour of Private and Family Worship, so there is nothing criminal in not observing a stated fixed Time.* Some Families have but little Interruption. Their Circumstances will easily permit them to settle a particular Hour for Worship. Yet, at Times, even these may be prevented by some unexpected Occurrences from observing the Time appointed. Let not these think they are criminal in this; for it is not the Time that is so much to be regarded, as the Worship itself, and the Manner of its being conducted. Other Families cannot fix upon any particular Hour; their Circumstances are so situated, as to render it impracticable, without the highest and most evident Inconvenience. To observe a settled Rule is not absolutely necessary to make the Family think well of Religion. Through Custom they may fall into Formality, and lose

\* Prov. iii. 6.

the Spirit of Worship. When you perform it sometimes at one Time, and sometimes at another, it does not tend to lessen their Esteem for it, provided it is not owing to any apparent Negligence in you, and that you go about it in a suitable Manner. Your Families will in general see the Reasons of your not keeping to an Hour, will in some Measure weigh them in their own Minds, and pass their Verdict on your Conduct: Therefore we should be careful how we act, so as to keep in their Minds honourable Thoughts of Religion, and yet so as to avoid sinking into Formality and Superstition. — Thus, as to Closet Worship, we are not to pay any superstitious Regard to any particular Hour, but chiefly to regard the Manner in which we attend.

4. *Examine seriously and thoroughly the Case, and take that Method that appears to you most conducive to honour God, and to promote your own and your Family's Good.* Here I would be a little particular as to Morning and Evening Worship. —

1. *As to Morning Worship — As to the Closet*; it seems to appear evident, that, if those Duties are profitably performed, the best Time is before we set about the World. If we neglect these till after we have been engaged in our secular Affairs, we shall find it a difficult Thing to perform them in a suitable serious Manner, with a Mind free from Distractions. It is fittest that we should give God our first Hours. 'Tis good to begin the Day with him. Watch over your Frames then, when you rise: And, if you would spend much Time with God in a Morning, and so as may be for your Growth in Grace, and for your spiritual Advantage, use yourselves to early Rising. O thou sluggish Christian! didst thou but know what sweet Communion some have with God in the Duties of the Closet, whilst thou art  
slumbering

slumbering upon thy Bed, it would certainly rouse and awake thee. Oh, the precious Moments that slide away, whilst thou art crying, A little more Sleep, a little more Slumber; it is Time enough to rise! No Wonder thou findest thy Heart so cold, and the divine Life so feeble and so languid in thy Soul. Thou hast but little Time to attend to it. Thou spendest so many Hours in Sleep, that, as soon as thou risest from thy Bed, thy Business calls for thy Attention; and so thou must either neglect thy Closet, or sadly curtail the Duties of it, and perform them in a cold and trifling Manner.

*As to Family Religion in a Morning* — Which appears the most fit and proper, to call the Family together as soon as possible, or to defer it till after we have refreshed animal Nature, and sat down as a Family to our Morning Meal? The first certainly seems to be the most suitable: Yet all Families are not in the same Circumstances, and therefore cannot all do alike. I would not by this encourage you to an Indifference to, or a Neglect of these Duties, but leave it to your Prudence as to the Time. Seriously weigh the Matter; and, if you can call the Family together, or as many as can be spared from the necessary Affairs of Life, let it be done as soon as possible, because your and their Minds are then freest from Distractions: But, if you should meet with unexpected Interruptions, yet do not neglect the Worship, but catch the first Opportunity to attend to it.

2. *As to Evening Worship* — Consider your Engagements in the Evening, and embrace that Time that may appear most convenient to yourselves and Families. — *As to yourselves in the Closet* — If you can spend some Time with God before you go out, let it be done; as this may be a Means of keeping you amidst any Temptations that may fall in your Way, and of keeping you from

from a Frame of Mind that may be dishonourable to God, and injurious to your own Souls! As to your Families, you may take the same Method with them too, provided your Engagements appear necessary, and attending to them would put off Family Worship to an unseasonable Hour. If you have your Evenings in general to yourselves, it appears fittest to worship God before the Evening Meal. Then your Spirits are freest, your Bodies have least Fatigue; whereas, if you defer it to the last Hour, you may be rendered unfit for it through the Hurries of the Day; and your Families, wanting Rest, may think it rather burdensome, instead of joining in it with any Degree of Pleasure and Willingness. This will be to offer the Halt and the Lambe in Sacrifice to God: Therefore avoid this, if you possibly can. But, if through some unexpected Occurrences it cannot be prevented, then guard your Families against Heaviness. — If your Evenings are not your own, you must then embrace that Time that Providence offers you. Here don't mistake me: I would not encourage Persons to a Habit of spending their Evenings abroad, to the Neglect of their Families and their Closets. But, as this cannot at Times be avoided, so use that Prudence that becomes your Character as Christians.

In fine — Do not be overscrupulous on the one hand, or negligent on the other. Don't think, because you cannot keep to a fixed Hour, or because through Interruptions you cannot fulfil your Resolutions, that you are criminal, provided the Souls of your Families lie upon your Minds, you desire to honour God in your Houses, and are enabled to attend to Family Duties in a serious, solemn, and instructive Manner. And do not willingly indulge any Slothfulness or Negligence; but carefully guard against every Thing that  
has

has a Tendency to dishonour God, and give those around you any trifling Thoughts of Religion. — Having thus given you a few Thoughts upon this important Subject, I would close with a particular Address to different Sorts of Persons. — And,

1. *To those that neglect Family and Closet Religion.* And are there any such amongst you? Do you call yourselves Christians? Do you make a Profession? What, and yet never pray, neither in Family nor Closet? I pity you with my whole Soul. Permit me to expostulate with you a little upon this Head. I dare not say, you are not Christians, because you pray not in your Families; but I may certainly say, that you act not as such. Oh, do you never consider the sad Example you are setting before your dear Children and Servants? Do you never consider the Cruelty you are guilty of to their Souls? Do you never view that awful Day, when you must give an Account of your Stewardship? Are you Professors, and yet nothing of God in your Families? Have your Servants seen as much in a Heathen Family as in yours? What a Dishonour are you, ye irreligious Parents and Masters, what a Dishonour to the Christian Cause? Never complain of your Children's Wickedness, your Servants Impiety: You never taught them better by an Example in the Family; you never prayed with them. — And do you neglect Closet Religion too? I may then warrantably say, you are no Christians, except in Name. Your Hopes of Salvation are all in vain: You are yet in your Sins. Oh, let me importune you to consider, before it is too late! Your Souls are perishing, starving, sinking, and will soon be lost for ever, unless sovereign Grace plucks you as Brands out of the Burning. Oh, whilst you are crying Peace, Peace, how awful, if sudden Destruction should come upon

upon you, as Travail upon a Woman with Child? Then you shall not, you cannot possibly escape! Oh, that I could draw or drive you to your Knees! —

2. *I would address those who keep up Family Worship in Part, but not regularly.* Some of you, perhaps, only attend on a Lord's Day. This Day you cannot let slip, without shewing your Families that you have some Regard for Religion, though all the Week you can slight it. And why is this? What, is Religion of no Importance on a Week-Day? Are your Families never to be put in Mind of God and Eternity in the Week? You perhaps cannot find Time. Your Engagements are such, that you cannot be at home till an unseasonable Hour; and then you are in a great Measure unfitted for it, and so neglect it. Thus you will gratify an Inclination to Pleasure or Company every Evening, and neglect your own and your Family's Souls. Excuse the Liberty I take with you; it is, I hope, if I know my own Heart, out of a Regard to the Honour of my Redeemer, and tender Love to your Souls. — Others attend every Evening, but not in the Morning. Your greatest Objection, I apprehend, to Morning Worship, is Want of an Opportunity. But, if you were to leave your Beds a little earlier, and manage your Affairs with Discretion, you would soon see the Vanity of this Excuse, and easily find Time for Morning Worship. Can you rationally expect the Blessing of God upon you in the Day? Is it not worth asking for as a Family? Remember, an Excuse may pass with Man, but not with God. Can you tell him you have no Time? Oh, consider seriously this weighty Affair!

3. *I would address those that keep up the Worship of the Family Morning and Evening.* And I would call upon you to examine your Ends and Views in all you do, to inquire

inquire into the Frame in which you generally attend upon Family Religion, and to be humble wherein you have been defective. How lame have your Duties oftentimes been? How imperfectly performed? How often hurried over, as if a Task? Have you been concerned to impress your Children and Servants with a real Sense of Religion? Have you not been contented with mere Prayer, but have you to this added Instruction too? Oh, have the Souls of your Families lain upon your Hearts? Have you prayed for yourselves and them, like Persons in good earnest? And have you endeavoured to walk agreeably to your Prayers? Has it been your Concern to live in the Discharge of those Duties you have recommended to your Families? Is it your Endeavour to walk so, that they may not think meanly of that Religion you profess? Go on, my dear Friends, in your Families and your Closets, and let nothing discourage you.

4. *I would address those who are just entering into the World, and becoming Heads of Families.* It is oftentimes a Difficulty with such to set up Family Religion. But, O my Friends, what is there for you to be ashamed of? Can you not pray with that Connection and Fluency of Expression, that you think may be useful? Don't be discouraged; but attempt it in the Strength of the Lord, and you will find him far better to you than all your Fears. God does not always make the finest Prayers the most useful, but blesteth weak Means to carry on his Work. Fear not, he will encourage your small Beginnings. If you give Way to Fears, they will grow upon you, and consequently your Difficulties of setting up Religion in your Families increase. Go to God therefore, and beg that he would give you Courage and Resolution to walk before and in your Family



suitably to your Character. Set up Religion therefore in the Name and Strength of the Lord; and fear not, you will find him a good Master to serve. Don't neglect Family Worship, let me intreat you. If you expect the Blessing of God upon your worldly Endeavours; if you would enjoy Peace in your own Minds; if you would have a religious Family, and have Prosperity in your own Souls; in fine, if you would honour Christ in your Day; set up Family Worship. Oh, begin with God, and let all around you see that, amidst your Pursuits of this World, you desire to have your Eyes chiefly fixed upon another, and to make the Concerns of your Souls your principal Business!

5. *I would address those, who have the Privilege of being in Families where Religion is kept up.* And,

(1.) *I would speak to Children* — And you, my young Friends, who have the Privilege of religious Parents, and with that all the Privileges of Family Religion, have Reason indeed to be thankful. How many Children hear nothing but Blasphemies from their Parents, and see nothing but what tends to poison their Minds, and to increase that Hatred of divine Things, with which they were born! But you have been instructed in the Principles of Religion; you have had a good Example before you. You know your Parents love you; for they watch over your Souls; they weep over you; they carry you to the Throne of Grace, and would rejoice to see you the Children of God. O happy Souls! what Numbers of Petitions have been, and are daily sent up to Heaven for you! Happy Souls, to have a visible Interest in the Promise,\* *I will be a God to thee, and to thy Seed after thee!* Sure, your Hearts have been

\* Gen. xvii. 7.

often melted ! Sure, you highly esteem your Privileges ! You cannot be prophane and careless, sure ! Oh, for you to sin costs you much ! For you to live and die Strangers and Enemies to Christ will be inexpressibly awful ! What must the Punishment be, that will be inflicted upon you ! “ Here is a Child of religious Parents, (may we not suppose the Judge saying ?) here “ is one who had all the Privileges of a religious Education : But he would not hearken to the Intreaties “ of his Parents ; he was deaf to every Argument, “ and hardened under all their Tears. Take him away, “ ye Ministers of Vengeance, heat the Furnace seven “ Times hotter for him, and let him have his Dwelling with everlasting Burnings.” — Oh, tremble, tremble, my dear young Friends, tremble at the Thoughts of being found Enemies to Jesus ; and beg of God, that he would enable you to prize your Privileges, and give you the Teachings of his Spirit, that you may grow under all your Enjoyments, and be the real Followers of a dear Mediator !

(2.) *I would speak to you, who are Servants in such Families* — And do you prize your Mercies ? Bless God, that he has cast your Lot where you hear of Jesus and Salvation ; where you are under the Care of praying Masters, such as long for the Salvation of your Souls. How many have been under some Convictions ? but, being in irreligious Families, their Convictions have been stifled, and, through the Influence of an evil Example, they have gone back to Folly. But you are not only where you hear of Salvation, but where every Conviction upon your Minds will be cherished and encouraged, and all Means used to bring you to a saving Acquaintance with Christ, and promote your Growth in Grace. Oh, prize your Privileges ; esteem those you serve highly ;

highly ; attend to their Instructions, and let your Walk and Conversation be suitable to your Character and Enjoyments. Oh, if you should perish, how many will rise up against you, and say, " We had not the Privileges of a religious Master ; we heard nothing of Jesus ; but you had daily Opportunities of hearing of Salvation, and of attending to the Concerns of your Souls !" — Oh, how cutting the Reflection, to consider that once you were Prisoners of Hope, were invited and exhorted to seek after an Interest in Jesus Christ ; but now it is over with you for ever ! Oh, that you may be sensible of your invaluable Enjoyments, carefully and seriously attend Family Worship, and be concerned to know God, and the Gospel of his dear Son ! Amen.



## C A S E IX.



*Is it not presumptuous for a Person to hope he has an Interest in Christ, when he sees little or nothing in himself but Reason to doubt and question it ?*

**T**HIS Question came to me in almost these very Words ; and, upon an attentive View of its Nature and Design, I could not but apprehend, that a distinct Solution of it would have a great Tendency to convince the Presumptuous, and encourage the Fearful. Some presumptuously endeavour to persuade themselves that they have an Interest in Christ, that their Sins are pardoned, and that their State is safe ; and so deceive themselves, to the Ruin of their Souls : And nothing is more dangerous, than such a presumptuous Hope ; because it is a strong Barrier in the Way of their receiving that Conviction of their Sin and Misery, that is necessary to drive them out of themselves and their Sins to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, some are as much afraid of receiving the true Hope of the Gospel, lest they should be guilty of presuming upon Christ and the Promises, when they have no Right to either : And nothing is more uncomfortable, distressing, and deterring, than the Prevalency of such a Fear. It must be acknowledged to be a very difficult Matter to steer the right Course between these two Extremes. For some abuse the Freeness of the Gospel, by imagining that, since Christ and his Grace are entirely free, therefore they have nothing to do, but to cast away all their

their Suspicions, and positively and absolutely to believe that Christ is theirs : While a serious Person, being sensible that there is such a Thing as a false, vain Hope, is therefore very backward to embrace the glad Tidings of Salvation in Christ for himself; and he makes the Sight he has of his own Vileness, Unworthiness, and Pollution, a Bar in the Way of his Hope, because he can see nothing in himself to ground it upon. The fearful Soul reasons after this Manner : It is certainly Presumption in all Cases to believe without Evidence; and no Sort of Persuasion can be more dangerous, than a groundless Belief of an Interest in Christ; and since I have no Ground in myself to believe in or hope for this, therefore I must never venture to apply Christ to myself, until I can see and feel some solid Evidences in myself of a Work of true Grace in my Soul. And thus the serious Person argues against himself, and prevents himself from embracing Christ as a free Saviour. 'Tis in this View, and with this Difficulty upon the Mind, that the present Question seems to be put : *Would it not be presumptuous for me to hope concerning an Interest, when I know and feel myself to be so guilty and corrupt, and can see nothing in me, but what tends to damp a Hope of this Kind ?* A direct and immediate Answer to this Question cannot be given; for we cannot positively say, in all Cases, either that it is presumptuous, or that it is not so; because that Hope, which we endeavour to receive, encourage, and maintain, may in one Case be the false Hope of a Hypocrite; and in another Case it may be the Struggling of the Spirit of Faith, in Opposition to the Fears and Doubts suggested by the Power and Prevalency of Unbelief.

That I might carry this Matter even, so as not to encourage a false Hope, nor discourage a true one; I would mention the Cases wherein such Hope is presumptuous, and under each Particular, as I pass on, would shew in what Cases this Hope is such as may and ought to be entertained and encouraged.

1. 'Tis presumptuous to persuade yourselves of an Interest in Christ, *when you have no real, hearty Concern about it.* Perhaps your Souls make it a very light Matter to believe in Christ, or to believe that he is your own: You can easily and calmly persuade yourselves into this Opinion. You don't care much about the Matter, having never had a real, Heart-impressive Sense of your Guilt, Danger, Pollution, and Need of an Interest in Jesus: Only you persuade yourselves that all is well with you, because God is merciful, and Christ is free: And this Opinion you entertain on Purpose to make yourselves the more easy and satisfied where you are. This is certainly a presumptuous Hope, and whoever receives and maintains it is in the utmost Danger of deceiving and ruining his own Soul.

But this seems very different from the Case of him, who puts this Question, with proper Seriousness and Concern.

Your Souls, in putting the Query, look upon it as a Matter of the greatest Importance. You would give all the World to be certain of an Interest in the atoning Blood, justifying Righteousness, and sanctifying Grace of Christ: Your Hearts are set upon these Things. But, because you cannot arrive at this comfortable Satisfaction, you therefore hang down your Heads, and go mourning all the Day in Darkness and Fear. Remember, for your Encouragement, ye concerned Souls, that if you are really desirous of, and cannot be satisfied, without  
the

the Blood of Christ for your Pardon, the Righteousness of Christ for your Justification, and the Spirit of Christ for your Purification; you may, under this Concern and these Desires, apply yourselves to Christ, and apply Christ to yourselves, without any Danger of presuming; because you may be sure the Grace of Christ is so free, that, if a whole Christ be welcome to you, you are welcome to Christ and all his Salvation.

2. 'Tis presumptuous to persuade yourselves of an Interest in Christ, *if the Persuasion be contrary to the Tenor of your Conduct.* If you are prophane in your Words, immoral in your Practice, or indulge some secret Iniquity in your Hearts; surely, for you in this Case to persuade yourselves of an Interest in the Favour of God, and the Salvation of Christ, must be daring Presumption: For Christ is not, and cannot be, the Minister of Sin. 'Tis a Presumption of the same Nature with that mentioned in *Micah iii. 11. The Heads thereof judge for Reward, and the Priests thereof teach for Hire, and the Prophets thereof divine for Money; yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD amongst us? No Evil can come upon us.* See here, that there is such a Thing as leaning upon the LORD in the Love and Practice of Sin: But it is a very presumptuous Trust.

But, if you are, and really desire to be, conscientious in your Conduct, circumspect in your Behaviour, and to be found walking in all the Statutes and Ordinances of the Lord blameless, hating every false Way; and you come to Christ for Strength against Sin, and for Grace to purify your Hearts and Lives, as well as for the Removal of your Guilt; this is a Desire that ought to be promoted, and a Hope in Christ that ought to be encouraged.

3. 'Tis presumptuous to persuade yourselves of an Interest in Christ, *if the Persuasion be contrary to the Conviction of your own Consciences.* This Head does in some Measure coincide with the former. But I mention it, that I might take an Occasion to explain a Text, and obviate a Difficulty, which has perplexed some serious Minds. The Passage referred to is, 1 *John* iii. 20, 21. *For, if our Heart condemn us, God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all Things. Beloved, if our Heart condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God.* The Difficulty drawn from these Words is to this Effect. The distressed Soul speaks in this Language: "In ~~how~~  
 " many Things does my Heart condemn me! What  
 " Backwardness to Duty, what Deadness and Inactivity  
 " in the Ways of God, does my Heart convince me of,  
 " and condemn me for! These, and ~~many~~ many more  
 " Things have I to lay to my own Charge: How then  
 " can I have any Confidence towards God? Or how  
 " can I dare to hope in him, or depend upon him, for  
 " Pardon and Salvation?"

To this I reply, If your Conscience condemns you, as to the secret Indulgence of and Delight in any particular known Sin, or as to the voluntary, stated, allowed Omission of any known Duty; and you endeavour to stifle these Convictions, and suppress or silence these Rebukes of Conscience, by attempting to persuade yourselves that Christ is yours; this is indeed truly and awfully presumptuous. In this Case your own Conscience forbids you to think that you have an Interest in Christ, and plainly tells you, that in this State and Frame of Soul you have no Part nor Lot in these Matters. Oh, don't attempt to stifle, silence, or suppress these Convictions; but rather yield to them, and pray that God would fasten them upon your Spirits, and that



that he would not let them subside, but would continue and fix them, that you might no longer lie asleep in Sin; but may fly to Jesus Christ for Pardon and Purification! And take it for granted, that so long as you maintain a voluntary Love to, and Delight in any particular Sin, which your Conscience condemns you for, so long your Souls and Jesus Christ are parted asunder.

But how very different is this from the Case of one, whose great, whose chief Desire it is to be delivered from the Power and Practice of every Sin; who sees and laments the Corruption of his Nature, the Deadness of his Frame, and the Carnality of his Heart; and who would fain hope concerning an Interest in Christ for his Deliverance from these spiritual Evils! And, if this be the real Temper of your Souls, don't say, *My Heart condemns me; and how can I have Confidence towards God?* Rather say, *My Conscience does not condemn me, as to any allowed Guile, or any indulged Iniquity; since it is the real Desire of my Soul, that God would search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked Way in me: And therefore I may wish humble Confidence go to God in Christ for pardoning and cleansing Grace.*

4. 'Tis presumptuous to persuade ourselves of an Interest in Christ, *if the Hope be contrary to the Proposal of Christ in the Gospel.* This Thought will be found a peculiarly turning Point, with Respect to the Nature of our Hope. If our Souls fly to and receive Christ, as he is proposed in the Gospel to us, the Hope arising from hence is such as ought to be encouraged, because it is such as will not make ashamed. But, if we do not apply to, and receive Christ under those Characters, and for those Blessings, which the Gospel displays, then there is an essential Flaw in our Hope; for the Christ we hope in is not the Christ of God. Give me leave here just

to mention *three* important Particulars concerning the View in which the Gospel proposes, and true Faith receives, Christ: Namely, (1.) As a *free* Saviour. (2.) As *the only* Saviour. (3.) As a *complete* Saviour.

(1.) As a *free* Saviour. Some Persons, in their first Application to Christ, endeavour to persuade themselves of an Interest in him, because they think they have something in themselves, or have done something by themselves, that will recommend them to his Regard. This they seek after, and can never think they have a Right to lay hold of him, until they can find something of this Nature in them: And thus they hope in him, not as a *free*, but as a *conditional* Saviour. Now, if this be the first Ground of your Hope, it is a *proud*, and therefore a *false or suspicious* one: Whereas every Soul, that hopes in Christ aright, sees itself to be utterly unworthy of, and unprepared for Christ, and runs to him as a Saviour entirely free. Now, if you see and feel yourselves utterly unworthy, guilty, weak, and polluted, and have nothing in yourselves to hope in, but endeavour to hope in Christ as a free Saviour; this Endeavour is by no Means presumptuous. See here how completely the Scale is turned from what Unbelief would suggest. A discouraged, distressed Person is apt to think it presumptuous for him to hope about an Interest in Christ, unless he sees or can find something within him to encourage that Expectation: Whereas, if he imagined any Thing within him as the Ground of his Encouragement, this very Circumstance tends to render the whole suspicious. Is it presumptuous to receive a free Gift, to plead a free Promise, to come upon a free Invitation, to build upon a free Foundation? Surely no. Whereas, if you are determined to force a Condition upon

upon Christ, or to come with a Price in your Hands to him, this is what Christ will reject and disdain.

(2.) As *the only Saviour*. If you hope you have an Interest in Christ, but don't make him the *whole* of your Salvation, but are for joining along with him your own Duties, Righteousness, Qualifications, or Attainments, this will be found a false or suspicious Hope. But, if you trust in him *alone*, casting aside all your own Strength and Righteousness, as bearing any Share in your Justification; then the Language of your Heart corresponds with the Sentiments of the pious Psalmist, whose Soul was built upon a right Foundation. Psal. lxii. 5. *My Soul, wait thou only upon God; for my Expectation is from him.* And if you can heartily say, as in the next Verse, *He only is my Rock and my Salvation;* you may add what immediately follows, *He is my Defence; I shall not be moved.*

(3.) As a *complete Saviour*. Christ and his Salvation are entirely free: But, if there be any Condition allowable, it is this. If you would have Christ, you must have a *whole* Christ; if you would have Salvation, you must have a *complete* Salvation. Christ is not divided, nor his Salvation neither. If you are for but half a Christ; for his Righteousness and Blood to pardon and justify you, but not for his Spirit and Grace to renew and sanctify you; your Hope in him is false and dangerous. But, if it be your Desire and Aim to receive him whole and entire; to receive his Doctrines, Instructions, and Illuminations, as a Prophet; to receive his Righteousness and Merit, as a Priest; and to receive or submit to his Government, and Sin-subduing Grace, as a King; you need not fear to hope in him.

Thus, as Christ stands in the Gospel under the Character of a free and complete Saviour, and the only one, we are to hope in him accordingly. Once more,

5. 'Tis presumptuous, to persuade ourselves of an Interest in Christ, *if the Persuasion be contrary to the Designs of the Gospel and its Promises.* These Designs may be thus briefly expressed; to humble the Sinner, to glorify the Saviour, to purify the Heart, and to comfort the Soul. Now then, do you endeavour to hope concerning an Interest in Jesus Christ? Ask your Souls what is your Design in this Attempt and Endeavour; Is it to have your State safe, and your Conscience easy, in the Way of Sin? Is it that you may be rendered able to justify yourselves in Part by your own Righteousness, or to sanctify yourselves by your own Strength? Is it to gratify your Pride, that you may be able to make such a Profession, or perform such Services, as may make your Name honourable? If such as these are Motives of your Desire and Endeavour to know your Interest in Christ, they are all detestable and destructive.

But, if your Desires to have, and to know that you have, an Interest in Christ, be such as these; that you may be more spiritual in your Frames, enjoy holy Consolation in your Souls; may be more pure in Heart and Life; may live more entirely upon Christ for Righteousness and Strength; may be humble in yourselves, and exalted alone in Christ's Grace and Righteousness; may be able to honour Christ more, serve him better, and may have more Strength for, and more Delight in spiritual Duties: Surely, such Endeavours, such Desires, and such Hopes are lawful, are laudable, and are by no Means presumptuous. And what, though you may see little in yourselves but Reason to doubt and question your Interest; yet be not afraid, with such Views and Desires as these are, to lay hold of Christ for yourselves, and to lay an humble Claim to him; and you will find, that nothing will be more helpful to regulate your

Ways, to subdue your Sins, to strengthen you for Duty, and to render you capable every Way to glorify Christ, (which are the very Things you desire) than a real Hope and hearty Belief that Christ is yours, and you his.

But you will, perhaps, still be ready to say, How can I hope or believe that I have an Interest in Christ, when I have no Evidence in myself to prove it? I answer, This is only an abstract Argument, which is urged by carnal Reason, on Purpose to promote discouraging Unbelief, and to hinder a Gospel-Hope. Is there no such Thing as hoping against Hope? Is not Christ set before you as the only Saviour, and as a compleat Saviour, and as one entirely free? Look then into the Proposals and Promises of the Gospel; and in *them*, though not in *yourselves*, you will find Ground sufficient to encourage your Application to Christ, and your Application of him to yourselves, for your Consolation, Sanctification, and Salvation.



## C A S E X.



*Is going to Plays and other theatrical Performances consistent with the Profession and Practice of Christianity?*

THE Answer to this Question, you will find, is in Consequence of the following Letter :

*Reverend Sir,*

“ I HAVE often been asked by my Acquaintance  
 “ to go to a Play. But, having had the Blessing of a  
 “ religious Education, and the good Example of pious  
 “ Relations; and being apprehensive that such Diver-  
 “ sions tend to diminish, if not entirely to extinguish,  
 “ the Zeal we should have for the Honour of God,  
 “ and the Purity of Religion; to eradicate all serious  
 “ Impressions, to cloud our Evidences, and to make  
 “ us careless about our precious and immortal Souls,  
 “ and remotely incline to Impurity and Irreligion; I  
 “ have hitherto resisted their Solicitations. But their  
 “ Entreaties becoming more frequent, and there being  
 “ many truly religious Persons, who have gone, and  
 “ still do at Times go to the Theatre, my Resolutions  
 “ are almost broken; therefore beg you will resolve the  
 “ above Query.”

THE Question I am now called to answer, needs not much Consideration; it being, I apprehend, evident at first View, that going to Plays and such pleasing Entertainments cannot be suitable to our Character as Christians,

as tending greatly to the Injury of our immortal Souls. Yet, as there are so many who are captivated with these bewitching Vanities, and are willing to find Excuses for their Pursuit of them, and say, there is no Harm in it; as there are many who are in great Danger of being carried away with these enchanting Pleasures, and yet would be glad to be fortified against the Snare; so I would take the Case into particular Consideration, and endeavour to convince you of the Unsuitableness and Danger of such *Practices*. And may what I have to offer upon this Subject strike your Minds with a peculiar Force! May you lie open to Conviction, and, upon a Consciousness of any Evil attending this Practice, be enabled to resolve, through divine Strength, to guard against this and every other Pleasure, that has a Tendency to injure your everlasting Welfare, and break in upon the Peace of your Souls! For the Truth of what I shall say, I would appeal to the Consciences of those who attend *Plays* and other *Diversions* of the like Kind, and only beg this Favour, that you would give every Thing that is said its due Weight, and let Conscience have its full Liberty: Let that but speak, and it will soon decide the Point. Having thus in some Measure prepared the Way, I would recommend to your Consideration the following Things:

I. *Attending Plays, and other Diversions of the like Kind; is by no Means profitable to our Souls.* If upon Examination we find that no real Advantage can be gained, it should be a Means of curbing our Inclinations, and of making us suspect, whether it is not our Duty to guard against all such *Diversions*. Some indeed plead as an Excuse, that Persons may make an Improvement of the *Theatre*, and gain as much Advantage from a *Play*, as from hearing a *Sermon*. This is a sad Ré-

flection

Reflection upon preaching the Word: And, however true it is as to some particular *Sermons*, which are only *empty Harangues*, contrary to the Genius of the Gospel, and designed only to tickle the Ear, and please the Fancy; yet Preaching, abstractedly considered, is a *divine Institution*; and therefore we may expect a divine Blessing upon it, to make it effectual to promote our spiritual Advantage. This cannot be said of a *Play*, which is a *mere human Invention*, designed, not to conform us to God, but only to amuse us: We cannot therefore reasonably expect the Blessing of God upon it, to make it effectual to our real Advantage. Such Excuses as these are very trifling, and will not bear even the most superficial Examination. There is so *much* that tends to eradicate all serious Impressions, to corrupt the Mind, and promote Dissoluteness of Manners; and there is so *little* that tends to Usefulness, and this *little* attended with such Circumstances, that there is not the least Probability of our being real *Gainers* by a *Play*. Who would go to the *Theatre*, or to *public Diversions*, to learn to hate Sin, to love Holiness, and be brought nearer to God? Do any really attend with these Views and Desires? I appeal to you. Is it so? You who have frequented the *Play-house*, what led you thither? Was it a Desire of spiritual Advantage? I may answer for you, *no*; and say, you had not the most distant View to this. 'Twas a Love of Pleasure, of Mirth, that carried you thither, and not any View to the Glory of God, or to your spiritual Profit. You will perhaps say, there is something peculiarly awful in a *Tragedy*: You have seen the Assembly struck with a solemn Silence; nay, many Faces all bedewed with Tears. This is no Proof that any real Advantage is gained. *Music* has all the Charms of Eloquence, all the Force of



of Oratory, in it: And those who have a musical Soul cannot withstand its Influence. Its Effect upon us, either to fill us with Melancholy, or to elate us, will be according to the Suitableness in the Music to our natural Frame and Constitution. This you see therefore is something *mechanical*. So the *Passions* may be touched, and wound up to the highest Pitch, by the Manner of Action upon the *Stage*, &c., but no saving spiritual Impressions made, nor any Good received. But, if there was any Thing in a *Tragedy* to strike the Mind, and fit it for serious Thoughtfulness; if there was any Part of the Performance, that tended to fasten a Conviction upon the Spectator; yet the Evening generally concludes with some *indecent Entertainment*, or something that tends to remove all Gloom from the Mind, and put an entire Stop to all Solidity of Thought. Thus *Plays*, not being calculated to promote our spiritual Advantage, have nothing in them that should appear sufficient to engage our Attention. — But,

II. *Much Time is spent in these Diversions, that might be spent to better Purposes.* — Time is a precious Thing, an invaluable Jewel. None can speak its Worth but a dying Person, or those who have entered the Regions of an awful Eternity. And must this Time be spent in Vanity, or thrown away upon the empty unsatisfying Pleasures of the present Life? Time! Oh, what is it!

Time, the Supreme! — Time is Eternity;

Pregnant with all Eternity can give: —

Who murders Time, he crushes in the Birth

A Pow'r ethereal, only not ador'd.

Such a Sense had the inimitable Young\* of Time, when he wrote these Lines: And oh, that we had all the same

\* Dr. Young's Night-Thoughts, Night II.

striking View of it ! Could you not spend that *Time* to better Advantage, that is spent in *Plays* ? You will say indeed, you may as well be at the *Theatre*, as spending your *Time* unprofitably, as many others do, viz. in revelling their Neighbours, or in frothy, nay, injurious Conversation. — But, if others spend theirs unprofitably, is that a sufficient Excuse for you, or any Reason that you should do so too ? Whatever we see in others that is unsuitable to the Character of a Christian, we should endeavour carefully to avoid : For he is inexcusable, who condemns any Thing in others, and is guilty of the same, or of worse, himself. But consider, how many, when you are in the *Play-house*, are in their *Closets*, examining the State of their Souls, or looking up to God by Prayer ? How many are with their *Families*, engaged in social Worship, or employed in religious and most instructive Conversation ? Had not this better be the Case with you ? You may sport with *Time* now in the midst of Health ; but the awful Period is coming, when you will see the Value of it. Will so many Hours, spent in these *public Diversions*, afford a pleasing Review ? Will it give you any Satisfaction, in the near Views of Eternity, to look back, and consider, how many important Duties have been neglected, whilst you have been gratifying a low Inclination, among Crowds of vain and irreligious Persons, at the *Play-house* ? Will such a Reflection as this soften a dying Pillow, silence the Clamours of an awakened Conscience, or sooth the Horrors of that critical and important Hour ? Hear what a Soul under the Force of alarming Convictions says upon this Subject ; hear the Reflections of an expiring Sinner ! — “ Oh, the *Time* I have foolishly, nay, wickedly spent in the *Play-house*, and in other vain and “ ensnaring Diversions ! Oh, that I should have no  
“ Concern

“ Concern for my dear immortal Soul ! Oh, how gladly  
“ would I call back the Hours I have wasted in such a  
“ criminal and stupid Manner ! But they are gone, gone  
“ never to return ; and all before me is Eternity ! Oh,  
“ what a Review ! It fills me with Shame and Con-  
“ fusion ; and the Pleasures that once so much entertain-  
“ ed me, and raised my Laughter, now sting and wound  
“ me to my very Heart.” — Would to God that every  
Person, who has any Fondness for the Diversions of  
the *Stage*, may see them in this Light, and be deeply  
humbled for their spending so much precious *Time* in so  
unprofitable a Manner ! Upon this Account it is highly  
unsuitable to our Character as rational Creatures, espe-  
cially as Christians, to frequent the *Theatre*.

III. *Attending upon Plays, and other such Pleasures,*  
*greatly unfit us for the spiritual Discharge of Duties, and*  
*leads to the Neglect of them.* If the Diversions of the  
*Stage* could be used only as a Relaxation of the Mind,  
to unbend our Thoughts for the present, that we may  
be the more fit for engaging in religious Duties, and  
go to them with greater Eagerness and Delight, there  
would then be some Shew of an Argument for the Pur-  
suit of them. But do these *Diversions* answer this Pur-  
pose ? I leave your Consciences to answer, you who have  
been there. Is it an easy Transition from the *Play-house*  
to the Duties of the *Family* or the *Closet* ? Can you with  
so much Composure of Mind, and Freedom and Regularity  
of Thought, read the Word of God, and seek him by  
Prayer ? Can you expect him with you in spiritual Du-  
ties, after you have been wasting so much *Time* in these  
*empty Pleasures* ? Have you gone into your *Closets* with  
the same *Quietness of Mind*, and met with the Presence  
of God as usual ? Oh ! be faithful to your Souls in this

Point, Don't smother the Truth. Nay, I would charge you, in the Name of the Lord, to give Conscience its full Scope, and let it speak Matter of Fact. Stand the Test then, and answer these Questions, if you can— Are not your Minds full of what you heard, when you come away? Do not the *pleasing Scenes*, which struck your Fancy, follow you into your *Closet*? Is it not oftentimes some Days before you can shake off the diverting Thought? Have you not found a *Shyness to Duty* after attending the *Stage*? Could you go to God with that *Confidence* as before, till you had humbled yourselves before him, and applied afresh to the Blood of Sprinkling? Have you had *Time* for the Performance of *Family* and *Closet Duties*, after you have been at the *Play-house*, or been till an unseasonable Hour at an *Assembly*? Oh, the Duties that have been curtailed, and often neglected, by attending upon such public Diversions! If this then is the Case, it manifestly appears, that going to *Plays*, and to *Pleasures* of the like Kind; is by no Means suitable to the Profession and Practice of Christianity.

IV. *Attending Plays, and other such Diversions, has a particular Tendency to set Persons against the Power and Life of Religion, and to make them take up with a mere Form.* That Religion, that will not admit of the Pleasures of the *Play-house*, is disregarded by all the Admirers of the *Stage*. What shall they do, who have had a religious Education, and have been followed with repeated Convictions? They endeavour by all possible Means to satisfy their Consciences, that attending *Plays* may be *innocently* done, and that it is perfectly consistent with real Christianity. Thus the Child; who has been accustomed to *Family* and *Closet Duties*, begins to look upon

upon these as unnecessary, and to think a pious Parent *too severe*, who is for abridging his Children of Amusements so *innocent*. The young Person, now become gay in his Behaviour, and wild in his Sentiments, is ready to think a godly Minister too stiff and precise, because he faithfully reproves the Lovers of Pleasure. He cannot think there is so much Duty required; so much Praying, Self-Examination, and Mortification necessary; and therefore by Degrees loses all that Regard for Religion, and the People of God, he once professed to have, and at last boldly sits in the Seat of the *Scoffer*. I need not ask you, my Friends, whether this is the Case or not: You have, I doubt not, known many awful Instances of it, and thereby see the evil Tendency of *Plays*, and other *Pleasures* of that Kind. If there are any of you, who visit these *Houses of Pleasure*, let me again appeal to your Consciences for the Truth of what I say. Let me particularly appeal to you who have had a religious Education, but have been led aside by these captivating Pleasures: Is not what I have said agreeable to Truth? You dare not deny the awful Fact; but you fain would smother it. You once discovered a serious Disposition; but *Plays*, *Assemblies*, &c. gave you a Disrelish to strict practical Religion, and led you to look upon it as unnecessary and burdensome: And now you would fain vindicate your present Practices, but you cannot: Conscience will at Times speak, and remonstrate. How awful, that any should attempt to defend a Practice so injurious! Do you ever see any Persons attend the *Play-house*, who are growing and flourishing Christians? As soon as they begin to make their Appearance there, and to relish the *Stage*, and other such *Diversions*, they begin to dwindle, and sink into a sad Formality. If this then is the Case, it clearly shews, how unsuitable

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attending the Theatre is to the Profession and Practice of Christianity.

V. *Attending Plays and other such Diversions is accompanied with the greatest Evils.*—This Practice is a sad Inlet into all manner of Sins: It opens a Door to the greatest Extravagancies; to support which the most desperate Measures are often taken, which bring the poor unhappy Creature to an ignominious End. The Stage may boast of thousands and ten thousands it has led captive, and ruined both as to Time and Eternity. How many lovely Youths, who once bid fair for Heaven, here lost all their Convictions, were introduced into evil Company, turned out the greatest Debauchees, consumed their Substance, destroyed their Constitution, broke the Hearts of their aged Relatives, and by their Intemperance and Debaucheries did not live out half their Days? That this is the Case, we have too many awful Instances to deny: And it is no Wonder, when we consider the Degeneracy of our Natures, and the Tendency of *Plays* to lead to Prophaneness in Conversation, and promote Impurity of Thought, by the wanton Songs, the filthy Jest, and blasphemous Speeches, with which many of them are crowded. A Youth, who has here lost his Religion, becomes an easy Prey to the great Enemy of Souls; for what has he to ballast him? Intoxicated with Pleasure, he is like a drunken Man, has nothing to prevent his complying with every Temptation that is presented before him. Oh, how many upon a dying Bed have lamented their frequenting the Stage, and other public Pleasures! How many have cursed the Day that brought them to a Sight of a Play, and entangled them in such Company, as proved their Ruin! — “ Oh, how happy, had I never stepped out  
“ of the Road I was directed to by my religious Re-  
“ latives!

“latives ! I was guarded against running into such dangerous Paths, cautioned of the Consequences ; but alas, I would not hearken to the tender Solicitations of my affectionate Friends ! I thought I might innocently go ; and oh, there my unwary Feet were caught ! The Net was carefully spread, and I was taken ! Oh ! lament, lament, my Soul, the *Time*, the *Hour*, I first gazed upon those pleasing, but destructive Scenes ! Now I am going into Eternity to give an Account of the Improvement of it to an infinitely just and holy God ; and oh, how awful the View ! What can I expect after a Life of such Irreligion and Prophaneness !” — Thus many have been led to Infidelity and Impiety, and will have it is to be feared, an Eternity to bewail their Folly and Stupidity.

VI. *For Professors to attend Plays, and other such Entertainments, is to set a bad Example.* — Thus our young Friend mentions it as being a Temptation to him, and as an Argument almost sufficient to answer every Objection, viz. that many truly religious Persons have, and still do at Times attend the *Theatre*. An awful Consideration this ! What, a Christian seen at the *Play-house* ! 'Tis something indeed amazing ! It is no Wonder to see an immoral Person crouding after public Diversions ; one who has no Sense of the Worth of his Soul, and the Importance of Eternity : But to see a Professor of Religion ; one who is willing to be esteemed a Christian, indeed, one who perhaps appears at the Table of our Lord ; to see such a Person amidst a crouded Assembly at the *Theatre*, and to hear him excusing his Attendance, by saying, there is no Harm in it, is something awful ! Well may a poor giddy Sinner make a bad Use of such an Example : Well may an unsteady Youth say, “ I



"may certainly now go, when such a Person attends. "I may now conclude it is not inconsistent with a religious Character, and therefore may indulge my Inclinations, when an Opportunity offers." Oh, see the melancholy Consequences; and the destructive Influence of a bad Example! Remember, if you go, others will go too. And suppose you could go to the Theatre innocently; yet, many who are prevailed upon, perhaps to go through your Example, may be ruined for ever: They cannot withstand the Force of those Temptations that are before them: Therefore a Concern for the Glory of God, a Consideration of the Influence of our Example, and a Regard for others, should keep us from the Play-house, and from every Pleasure, that we think may be injurious to the Souls of others, even suppose it should not be so to our own.

Thus I have hinted a few Things, that are, I apprehend, sufficient to shew, that going to the Theatre, &c. is *unsuitable to the Profession and Practice of Christianity*. If any amongst you have an Inclination to attend the Stage, and other public Pleasures, and can answer it to God, to yourselves, and to others, that none of these Things shall be the Consequences, then go: But I may venture to say, that the above Hints are so near the Truth, that none, who have frequented public Places of Pleasure, can deny, if they would faithfully relate their own Experience. — I would now therefore accompany what I have said with a warm and affectionate Address. — And,

1. To Masters and Heads of Families — particularly, To those who attend themselves — And let me intreat you to consider the bad Example you are setting before your Families. Consider the unhappy Use they are like to make of it. No Wonder you find them desirous of walking



walking in your Steps. To see you frequently setting out for the *Theatre*, and to hear you perhaps recommending some of the Parts you have seen acted, cannot but raise in them a Curiosity to see the same; and they apprehend they may boldly ask to go, or even take the Liberty, if it should be denied. And what can you say to discourage them? You cannot consistently represent the Danger of such Practices: This would be an Argument against your Attendance as well as theirs. How can you forbid them going, or curb an Inclination in them to the *Theatre*? How can you complain of their Extravagancies, or correct them for their being so frequently there? You lead them thither yourselves. You may justly chide yourselves, and say, "How can I wonder to see in my Children and Servants such a Desire after the Pleasures of the *Stage*, when I have done enough to raise it in them? Must I not blame myself for all the Gaiety and Extravagancy of my Child? I taught him first to go to a *Play*; and see what Evils I have hereby introduced into my Family! I gave my Son a Taste for the *Play-house*; and see what are the Consequences! He has contracted an Acquaintance with those who will be his Ruin! How extravagant in his Expences! How is he enfeebling his Constitution by Intemperance, &c! And what will be the End of all? A tragical one, I fear; and all occasioned by my own Folly!"

*Let me speak a Word to such who permit their Children and Servants to frequent these Diversions.* And is it so? Do you take no Care how your Children and Servants spend their Evenings? Do you never inquire into the Company they keep? Never guard them against those Houses of Pleasure, that are so ruinous to Youth?

Can you connive at the Liberties they take, the Hours they spend abroad, and suffer them wantonly to indulge every criminal Inclination? Oh, how can you answer it to God, to your own Consciences, and to those who entrusted their Children and their Relations with you? Do you never consider that the Souls of your Families are committed to your Care? Do your Consciences never check you, at acting so cruel a Part by your Children, and so unfaithfully by your Servants? Oh, how are you helping your Families to Ruin! seeing Satan hurrying them on to Destruction, and yet never endeavouring to prevent it! Alas, alas! Use your Authority: Let the Souls of your Families lie with Weight upon your Minds; and don't suffer one in your House to be pressing on in the Road to everlasting Destruction, without warning them of the Danger, and endeavouring to do all you can to promote their Salvation.

2. *I would address myself to Professors of Religion upon this Subject.* — Need I ask, whether any of such a Character attend the *Theatre*? This City presents us with too many awful Instances of it. See amongst the Croud, that is pressing into the *Play-house*, how many *Professors*! They chearfully mingle with the Throng, appear as eager as any in the Pursuit of Pleasure, and as much delighted with those Scenes of Vanity. Oh weep, O my Soul, that this is the Case! And will not every one who has a Zeal for Christ drop a Tear, that he should be thus dishonoured? — How shall I address you, ye *cold Professors*? Have you any real Love to Jesus? Do not your Hearts deceive you? Is it surely so? 'Tis a Sign that your Love is but cold, your Faith weak, and that you have but little Concern for the Glory of God, when you can hurry to such Places of Profaneness.

nese. Let me entreat you to consider, how inconsistent your Conduct! How can you answer it to your Fellow-Christians, how to God, and to your own Consciences? Oh, you stumble, you discourage, nay, you harden many. You occasion many Reflections upon Christ and his Interest. May he not justly complain of you, and say — “What, have you no Regard for my Glory? “What, bear my Name, and harden the Hearts of so “many against me, encourage Sin, and bring such a “Dishonour upon me! Have I done any Thing to de- “serve such Goldness, ye *lazy Professors*? Consider my “Love; consider my Service; and let a Zeal for my “Glory continually animate your Souls, and guard you “against every Thing that tends to weaken your Hands, “and to bring any Reflections upon me or my Cause.”

3. *I would close all with a particular Address to young Persons.* You are the Persons, who are more particularly under Temptation of being carried away by such bewitching Vanities. I would therefore guard you against them. Have any of you attended these *Houses of Pleasure*? and have you not found them tending to give you looser Thoughts of Religion than you once had, and to lead you to take greater Liberties than you once did? Let this satisfy you that there is Danger in them; and therefore be persuaded carefully to avoid them; and be deeply humbled before God, that you have ever frequented them. I hope you are not determined against Conviction. I would set before you the Worth of your Souls, the Importance of Eternity; and call you to view the Transactions of the great Day, when you will receive a Sentence of everlasting Life, or of everlasting Condemnation. Oh, consider how you will answer to an infinitely holy God, your spending so much Time in  
such

such empty Pleasures ! View the vast Assembly that will be gathered ! See thousands of thousands at the right Hand of Jesus, and a numberless Throng at his left Hand ! See all earthly Scenes closing for ever, and the State of each Person fixed ! Oh, if your Minds were once suitably impressed with a Sense of these important Things, you would soon see the *Impropriety and Danger of Plays* ; your Minds would be taken up with viewing Subjects of infinitely greater Importance, than these low and perishing Things. — Oh my dear young Friends, I cannot leave you, knowing the Snares you are exposed to. I would entreat you : I would warn you : I would beseech you. If you have any Concern for your Souls ; if any Love for your Friends, any Desire to honour Christ, let me beseech you to guard against these, and such-like bewitching Pleasures. Oh, I cannot leave you. I will try once more to convince and move you. I would beseech you by the Love of the *Mighty God* : Oh, see him willingly veiling his Glory, and coming to rescue poor Souls from everlasting Misery ! Behold him nailed to the accursed Tree ! Hear him groaning ! See him bleeding, dying ! And all to redeem precious Souls, and to purchase for them the Blessings of Salvation ! And can you now dishonour this Jesus ? I would not think so hardly of you. Sure you cannot ! In fine, labour to follow *Solomon's Advice* ; and, *if Sinners entice, consent you not*. Let me beg you to follow the Instructions of your religious Friends ; and, whilst others are spending their Time in the Pursuit of Pleasure, do you be considering and pursuing the Concerns of your Souls : You will find it to your unspeakable Satisfaction,

**CASE X.]****Cases of Conscience**

155

both in Life, and at Death. Whilst others are trembling and shuddering upon the Brink; for you to stand and look into Eternity; for you to be enabled to say with the Apostle\*, *We have fought the good Fight, we have finished our Course, and have kept the Faith*; oh, it is impossible to express the Pleasure this will give you! If then you have any Concern for your Peace, living and dying, beg of God to keep you from Sin, and to enable you to improve and use your Time, so as may be for your everlasting Advantage. Amen,

\* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

**CASE**

C A S E   X I .

*How may a Person, who is desirous of following the Dictates of Providence in every Respect, know the Mind and Will of God in any particular Circumstance, whether temporal or spiritual?*

**T**HIS is a Question of so large an Extent, and of so great Importance, that the very Sight of it, when it came into my Hands, raised in me a great Desire to give some Solution of it. But, when I looked more attentively into the Nature and Purport of it, I found it to be a Question attended with so much Difficulty and so much Nicety in many Cases, that I was made almost to doubt whether I should attempt an Answer to it or no. However, looking up to the Spirit of God, and into the Word of God, for Direction in an Affair of so much Moment, I have ventured upon it; and shall now offer you my Thoughts on the Subject in the most free and open Manner. And although I cannot pretend to give such a particular or such an extensive Answer to it, as the Case may require; yet I shall not account my Labour in vain, if enabled to exhibit some general Rules, which may be helpful to the serious Christian in determining his Course of Duty. As for those who have not the Fear of God before their Eyes, they are unconcerned about the Matter; they go on in the Ways of their own Hearts, and in the Sight of their own Eyes,

Eyes, and, at best, advance no higher than to follow the Maxims of human Prudence and worldly Wisdom. But the truly serious Person desires to follow the Dictates of Divine Providence in every Respect, and is concerned to have the Lord going before him in every Step, pointing out his Way, and marking out his Path for him. He would not, he dares not walk at Random, as knowing that the Path of Duty is the only Path of Safety and Comfort. But how the Christian should know or find out his Path, is the great Question before us.

Here then it will be necessary first to explain the Terms of the Question, and then give an Answer to it both *negatively* and *positively*.

I. As to the Explication of the Meaning of the Question itself: This is so very needful, that, unless you attend to it, you will not be able to see, into the Nature and Suitableness of the Answer. For I apprehend that a great Part of the Difficulty belonging to the Subject arises from a Misunderstanding or a Misapplication of the Terms in which it is conceived; and a clear Conception of the Meaning of the Case proposed will of itself prevent many Mistakes, and will give a general Clue for the Solution of it.

There is some Reason to fear, that, by the Mind and Will of God in a particular Circumstance, many understand something that is absolutely unknown to us, or not to be known by us without a special, fresh Revelation: And therefore, when they are seeking after, or praying for the Knowledge of the Divine Will, they aim at some peculiar Illuminations or Impressions, which are neither to be sought after, nor to be depended upon; by which Means they are unnecessarily perplexed, and often sadly deluded. We must therefore, in this Case,

Case, be particularly upon our Guard against a Species of Enthusiasm, which we may be too easily inclined to, and insnared by.

To prevent Mistakes of this Nature, let it be observed, that these Phrases, the *Dictates of Providence*, and the *Mind or Will of God*; though they are very proper to the Subject, yet are truly *metaphorical*. Let me therefore express what we mean, (1.) by the *Dictates of Providence*; (2.) by the *Mind and Will of God* in a particular Circumstance; and, (3.) by *following these Dictates of Providence*, or conforming ourselves to this Will of God.

(1.) What is meant by the *Dictates or Voice of Providence*. We are not to imagine that Divine Providence of itself, abstractedly considered, makes known any Thing to us: But we must include his Word of Revelation in the Affair. For in Reality, by the Voice of Providence, we mean the Voice of God in his Word, concerning our Duty as to the particular Providences we are attended with. Thus we say, that *afflictive Providences* have an humbling Voice in them; by which, I presume, is meant, that, when we are under afflictive Dispensations, the divine Word directs and teaches us to submit to, and be humble under, the mighty Hand of God. *Prosperous Circumstances* call us to Thankfulness; *i. e.* God requires us to be thankful for all his Mercies to us; and, when such Favours are bestowed upon us, it then becomes our Duty to be thankful for them.

A *Situation of special Temptation or Insnarement* has a Voice in it to call us to Watchfulness; *i. e.* 'Tis the Mind and Will of God, by his Word, that we should be peculiarly upon our Guard, when Providence brings us into such Circumstances of Trial. These Particulars are



introduced in this Place as familiar Instances, to give an Idea of what we mean by the Voice of Providence. And if we clearly conceive the true Import of the Phrase by these Hints, we may proceed and apply the Thought to those Circumstances, which more nearly concern the present Question, after this Manner: Whenever Providence hedges or stops up one Way of Safety, Comfort, or Duty, so that we cannot proceed any farther in it, and at the same Time opens out another Way to go in; then it is evidently the Voice or Dictate of this Providence, that we should leave the former Way, and betake ourselves to the other, which appears to be most conducive to our Safety, Usefulness, or Comfort: Which is the same as to say, that God makes it our Duty, by his Word, to take such Steps as appear most conducive to his Glory, and our real Good, in all Circumstances in general; and so, by this general Rule, it becomes our Duty in the Circumstance above supposed to leave one Path of Life, and pursue another. And now it will be more easy to learn,

(2.) What is meant by the *Mind and Will of God in any particular Circumstance*. For it cannot intend any Secret locked up in the Divine Breast, which must be made known by a special Revelation: But we must understand by it the revealed Will of God, which by its more general, or more particular Rules gives us proper Directions for Duty, and Safety, and Usefulness, in any distinct Circumstances of Life or Providence. And therefore,

(3.) To follow the *Dictates of Providence*, must mean no other than to act agreeable to the Laws of Duty, Prudence, and Safety, in any particular Circumstance, according to the Directions or Determinations of the Word and Law of God. He follows these Dictates, who

who takes a due Survey of the Situation he is placed in, compares that with the Rules of the Word which reach the Case, and acts accordingly. Such a Person neither delays when Providence calls, nor hurries on before it calls.

Having thus explained the Terms of the Question, I doubt not but you see that the very Explication itself tends to solve many Difficulties, and prevent many Mistakes, and to give you a general Clue for your Conduct. Let us now bring down what has been said into the Question itself. It supposes that you have some particular Affair depending, whether temporal or spiritual; that you are at some Loss to determine which Way to act, or what Method to take: And you desire to know what is the Mind and Will of God in the present Case. Here then let me beg you to recollect in your Thoughts, what you do or should mean by this Will of God. It certainly means no more than for you to be able to understand and judge what is the properest Course to be taken, agreeable to the Situation you are in, and agreeable to the Rules and Directions of the divine Word in your Case. If you mean any more than this, I apprehend you aim at and intrude into those Things which are not seen, and which it is not your Business to know: For *secret Things belong to God*. Deut. xxix. 29.

In order to come at the Knowledge of that which it is proper and needful for us to be acquainted with, we are taught by Prudence and Conscience to make Use of, (1.) *Deliberation*. (2.) *Consultation*. (3.) *Supplication*.

Our *Deliberation* should be serious and attentive. We should look around us, and observe what Condition and Circumstances we are in; should turn our Thoughts about every Way that we can, in order to view our Situation in every Point of Light in which it appears; and

and should then compare it with Rules of Prudence and Duty laid before us in the Word.

Our *Consultation* with Friends should be sincere and prudent, with a Design to receive what Light their Conversation may convey : For in most Cases it is true, that *in the Multitude of Counsellors there is Safety.*

Our *Supplication* to the LORD for Direction should be serious, earnest, and submissive. Without this, we are in great Danger of being led astray, notwithstanding all previous Consideration and Consultation : For the Lord will be owned and acknowledged ; and, if he is neglected, we are guilty of leaning to our own Understanding, or depending upon the Wisdom of Men. We are strictly required to be submissive to divine Direction : For *the Meek are those that he will guide in Judgment, and teach his Way.* Psal. xxv. 9. And we have the greatest Encouragement, to hope for safe Conduct in this Course ; because it is added in the following Words, Psal. xxv. 10. *All the Paths of the Lord are Mercy and Truth to such as keep his Covenant and his Testimonies.* Yea, we have a positive and gracious Promise of divine Conduct, Psal. xxv. 12. *What Man is he that feareth the LORD ? Him shall he teach in the Way that he shall choose.* But, when you are thus seriously employed in seeking Direction from the LORD, take heed that your Speech, your Thoughts, and Desires be ordered aright. Let me here ask you, What do you really mean by seeking divine Direction ? Do you hereby desire any Discovery of his secret Will by any unaccountable Impulses, or any irrational Impressions ? If so, I really question whether this very Desire is either warrantable or safe. I will tell you briefly what I would mean by such a Practice. When I pray for his Guidance and Direction in a particular Perplexity,

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I beg of him, that he would lead my Thoughts by his Spirit into such a View of the Directions of his Word, and of the Conduct of his Providence, that I may from thence be able to judge what is my Path of Duty; that he would so order Affairs in his Providence, as to make my Way clear to me upon the Principles of Duty, Prudence, and Conscience; and that he would so fix my View, and so incline my Heart, as to make me ready and willing to take those Steps, or pursue those Measures, that may be most conducive to secure the Peace of my Conscience, to advance the Glory of his Name, and to promote my real Good. Having so distinctly explained and guarded the Question, I proceed,

II. To give an Answer to it. The Question then returns in this Form: Having made Use of proper Consideration, Consultation, and Supplication; *what must we look upon, after all, as Marks or Tokens of the Divine Will and Pleasure in any particular Case that now lies before us?* The Reply must be made both *negatively* and *positively*.

1. *Negatively*. We are often very prone to increase our Perplexity, or to run into the Way of Danger, by mistaking the Rule, and following those Things as Guides, which have no Certainty or Safety in them: And this renders it highly necessary, that false Rules should be laid aside, in order to make Way for a clear Answer to the important Query.

(1.) We should not make our *Inclinations* the Rule of our Conduct: For, through the Depravity and Vanity of our Hearts, we may often find a Propensity to that, which Prudence and Conscience, if consulted, would reprimand against; and an Aversion to that, which the Word and Providence of God make our Duty. In some Cases; indeed, it is very necessary to consult

consult the Inclination, Genius, or Capacity, and take it into Consideration, while we are weighing and pondering what Course of Life will be the most suitable to us, or our Friends. But, after all, Inclination is no Standard or Rule either of Duty or Prudence.

(2.) We should not make our particular *Frames* the Rule of our Judgment and Determination: Because we find ourselves sometimes in Frame for that which is not our present Duty; and, when Duty and Prudence call, our Frames may be unsuitable and reluctant. It might not be improper in this Place a little to animadvert upon a Method, which some serious Persons take, by forming their Judgment from the Enlargement or Contraction of their Frames in solemn Prayer. If they are engaged in serious Devotions, seeking to the LORD for a particular Favour in Providence; if they find themselves peculiarly enlarged, they gather from thence, that the Favour shall be granted; but, if they are peculiarly contracted, they take it as a Token of a divine Denial; and so frame their Actions according to these Views or Expectations. But this I apprehend is an erroneous and uncertain Rule of Judgment: For, although many a Time the Event may come to pass agreeably to this Rule, yet *many* Times it has proved just the reverse; and if we lay any considerable Stress upon these Frames, we are in Danger of being misled as to the Way of Duty, and of having our Faith and Hope shocked and stumbled by an unexpected Disappointment. As this Rule of Judgment is not given us in the Word, it is therefore uncertain: And yet we should be ready to acknowledge thus much; that so far as the Liberty of our Frames excites and encourages us to use proper Means, and so far as the Contraction of our Frames prevents us from being presumptuous or too forward in

our Conduct, so far it is a Mercy to us that we are thus encouraged, or thus cautioned. And it is very likely, that God may sometimes enlarge our Hearts in Prayers, with a Design to excite and encourage us; or contract our Hearts with a Design to prevent us from using those Means, or taking those Steps, which may be detrimental. But still the Rule of Judgment and Duty is to be gathered from the Appearances of Providence, and the Directions of the Word.

(3.) We are not to be guided by the bare *Form of Scripture-Phrases*. Far, very far, would I be from laying aside the *Use* of the holy Scripture in these Points; but would only guard against Abuses of it. There are some Christians who are fond of using the Bible as if it were a *Fortune-Book*: When a Difficulty in Prudence or Duty occurs, they will open the Bible at Random, and observe what Text meets their Eyes first; and, according as the wild Imagination applies that Passage to the Point in Question, so they think it their Duty to act. This is a very weak and dangerous Practice, and a sad Abuse of the Word of God, applying it to a Purpose for which the Holy Ghost never intended it. Others will make a Random-Application of a Passage of Scripture (which suddenly occurs to, or is strongly impressed upon their Minds) to their present Case and Difficulty; never looking into, or attending to the proper Meaning of the Text, but straining and applying it to something very foreign from the Intention of the Holy Spirit. For Instance: If the Query be, whether you should follow the Practice of a Neighbour or Friend, and you have those Words impressed upon your Mind, *Go thou, and do likewise*; you are apt from thence assuredly to gather, that it is the Mind and Will of God you should do as he does. This Method of judging concerning  
Prudence

Prudence and Duty is extremely weak, precarious, and dangerous : For it can never be supposed that the Holy Spirit intended these Words in the Bible to be thus applied and used at Random. But this brings me to observe,

(4.) That we are not to be guided by any *unaccountable Impulses and Impressions*. There are many who frequently feel such Impressions upon their Minds, and are inclined to pay a very strict Regard unto them. Yea, some carry this Point so far, as to make it almost the *only* Rule of their Judgment, and will not determine any Thing, *until they find it in their Hearts to do it*, as their Phrase is. Others take it for granted, that the Divine Mind is notified to them by sweet or powerful Impressions of some Passages of sacred Writ\* : And there are others who are determined by visionary Manifestations, or by the Impressions made in Dreams, and the Interpretations they put upon them. All these Things, being of the same general Nature, may very justly be considered together. And it is a Matter of Doubt with many, how far these Things are to be regarded or attended to by us ; and how we may distin-

\* By these sweet and powerful Impressions of Scripture Phrases or Sentences upon the Mind, I do not here mean their being set home upon the Heart and Conscience, agreeable to the true Meaning and proper Design of the Holy Spirit in them : For, whenever this is the Case, it is evident they are very desirable and valuable, as the Effect of God's Spirit upon the Heart. But I mean such unaccountable, occasional Impressions of Scripture Passages, as are foreign from the proper Meaning of the Holy Ghost in them. We are not to esteem these any Rule of Conduct, nor immediately act according to them, as if Notifications of the Divine Will ; for they may be delusive, instead of being directory. But however, it may be granted, that, so far as these *false* Impressions excite in our Minds those Thoughts which are according to Scripture-*Truth*, though not the Truth of the Passage impressed, so far they may be really useful both in providential and spiritual Concerns.

guish any divine Impressions of this Kind from the Delusions of the Tempter, or of our own evil Hearts. Give me leave here to say, that whoever makes any of these Things his *Rule* and *Standard*, he forsakes the divine Word; and nothing tends more to make Persons unhappy in themselves, unsteady in their Conduct, or more dangerously deluded in their Practice, than a paying a *Random-Regard* to these Impulses, as Notifications of the Divine Will. To take it for granted, that it is our Duty to act so or so, because it is impressed upon our Minds, or because our Dreams bear such an Interpretation; or even because a Passage of holy Writ is applied to our Minds in a powerful and unaccountable Way: I say, thus to judge, is an enthusiastical Delusion, which ought to be avoided and detested by all sober Christians, as a bold Intrusion into the secret Will of God, as a Withdrawment of Heart from the proper Rule of Duty, as regarding lying Vanities, and forsaking our own Mercy. But you will say, "Are not some of these Impressions divine? Has not many a Christian found himself mercifully led in the proper Path by these impulsive Methods? Nay, have not some Believers been comforted and directed, yea, and some Sinners awakened, and brought savingly to Christ, in this impulsive Way, by Dreams, Visions, or powerful Impressions of some Parts of sacred Writ? And, if so, there is certainly some Reason to regard them, to desire them, wait for them, and be thankful for them." I would answer, And are not many of them purely enthusiastical, if not diabolical? The Question therefore returns, How may we distinguish those Impressions that are delusive, enthusiastical, or diabolical, from those that are true and divine? Now here it is natural to observe, that the very putting or admitting this

Question



Question supposes and proves that these Impulses cannot be the *Standard* of Duty, nor of *themselves* Indications to us of the Mind and Will of God; but we must recur to some other Rule to try the Spirits whether they be of God. For which Reason they are not to be depended upon: And those who find themselves frequently acted upon in this impulsive Way, ought to be extremely upon their Guard, lest they are so deceived or deluded as to place a Dependence upon them. 'Tis, doubtless, a Mercy and Privilege for any to be so impressed, as to be thereby excited or directed into the right Path of Duty; and whatever Impulses quicken us to it, we may be thankful for: But, after all, they must not be accounted the Rule or Standard of Right and Wrong. You may therefore take this as a general Rule: That, whenever these Impressions are such as lead us to depend upon *themselves*, and direct our Course according to them absolutely, they are really enthusiastical, or very much to be suspected upon that Account. I am obliged therefore to put the Matter upon this plain Issue: Either these Impulses excite Thoughts and Reasonings in our own Mind concerning the Path of Duty, or they do not: If they do not, and have nothing to offer as a Reason why we should follow them, but because we find ourselves so excited and impressed, they are then properly enthusiastical: But, if they do awaken our Thoughts and Concern, and turn our Minds to think upon some scriptural or prudential Reasons for our Conduct, then the Thoughts suggested are to be brought to the Standard of Prudence and Duty, and to be determined from thence whether they are right or wrong. And we may vindicate the promised Leadings of God's Spirit, without giving Encouragement to enthusiastic Pretences, upon this Principle: That the Spirit of God has

Access to our Minds, and works upon us so as to lead our Thoughts unto the Law and Testimony, and to direct our Minds to such Truths of Scripture, and such Rules of Prudence, as are most adapted to direct us in a present Difficulty. Let me add,

(5.) We must not make the *Event* our Rule of Judgment. My Meaning is this: If we have taken a Step conscientiously in the Fear of God, and it does not succeed; we need not therefore reflect upon ourselves, as if we had done wrong; but rather submit to God's sovereign Providence. And, if we have taken a Step carelessly, presumptuously, or without proper Reason to vindicate it, and it succeeds beyond our Expectation; we should not therefore soothe our Consciences, as if we had done right; but rather encourage a thankful Admiration that God should deal with us in Kindness, so contrary to our Deserts. But it is high Time to come to,

2. The *positive* Answer to this interesting Question, The Spirit of God by his Operations always makes Use of, and directs us to the Word and Providence compared together, in order to open to us the Path of Duty. So that the general Rule for us to judge by is this: That which evidently appears, after serious Deliberation, proper Consultation, and earnest Supplication, to be impracticable, unlawful, or imprudent, we are to esteem *not to be* the Mind and Will of God in the Case: And whatever appears to be proper Duty, true Prudence, or real Necessity, that we should esteem *to be his Will*. To render this general Rule familiar and easy, I would conclude with the Application of it to some extensive Particulars.

(1.) Unless something different from your present Situation offers itself to your serious Consideration, you are not to be desirous of changing your State, except  
in

in such Cases as the following. Perhaps Providence begins to render your present Situation very *uncomfortable*, and really *unprofitable* to yourselves or others; or makes your Continuance in it truly impracticable. If so, we may assuredly gather, that we should look out after and seek for some Alteration. Or perhaps, though your present Condition may be easy and profitable, yet there may be such Changes attending it, as to render it *unlawful* for you to continue; you cannot remain in this Business or Place any longer, without making a Breach upon your Conscience, without violating the divine Law, without omitting some incumbent Duty, or depriving yourselves of some necessary Privilege, or being exposed to the prevailing Power of some Sin or Temptation. Whenever your Situation appears such, as to render it impossible for you to abide in it without sustaining such sad Consequences, you may assuredly gather, that it is now the Will of God that you should immediately look out for some other Place or Employment. You are not to be given to Change: But in such Cases as these we are warranted and required by Prudence and Duty to change our State or Circumstance, and seek out after something else, whether there be any immediate Proposal of another Nature, or no.

(2.) When an Alteration of Circumstance is proposed to you, or Providence lays two or more Things before your Eyes; to choose whether to continue where you are, or to enter upon a different Situation, or of two different Situations which of them to accept; endeavour to take a distinct View of each proposed Case, so far as comes within the Compass of your Knowledge; compare them with one another, and with the Condition of yourselves or Families, &c. and then determine by such Maxims as these. Of *two natural Evils*, choose the least: This

is a plain Rule in Prudence. Of *two moral Evils*, choose neither; but fly from both upon every Consideration; nor let your Conscience be soothed or silenced with that sad Principle, Rom. xiii. 8. *Let us do Evil, that Good may come of it*; for their Condemnation is just who do so, let their Consciences be ever so easy or pacified about it. *Determine always on the safest Side in Affairs of Conscience*; and, while your Minds scruple the Lawfulness of any Thing, and you can with a safe Conscience abstain from it, Duty requires you should abstain: For he that thus doubteth is self-condemned, if he ventures upon it, because he does it not of Faith; for whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin. *Happy is the Man that condemneth not himself in the Thing that he alloweth.* Rom. xiv. 22, 23.

Of *two moral or spiritual good Things*, choose the greatest, if you have Capacity and Opportunity for it; for Duty requires us to be ready to every good Word and Work. That Situation wherein you can do and receive the greatest real Good to yourselves or others, that Situation wherein you can best promote the Glory of God, and serve your Generation according to his Will, should be embraced by you.

Of *two natural good Things*, you are not always to choose the greatest; but fix upon that, even though it be the least, that appears best to subserve the real and spiritual Good of yourselves and others. Don't set your Eye and Heart upon worldly Riches, Honours, or Pleasures: *For they that will be rich fall into Temptation and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition.* 1 Tim. vi. 9. These Things are to be sought after only in a strict Subserviency to real and spiritual Advantages: For which Reason you must take special Care about your Motives  
and

and Views in Affairs of this Kind. For Want of this Guard upon yourselves, you will be in Danger of embracing any Thing that is shining and promising to an Eye of Sense, to the Loss and Detriment of those Things that alone can make you truly happy, comfortable, and useful.

(3.) When, upon due Consideration, nothing appears in the Necessity of the Case, or the Pointings of Providence, to make your Way clear; don't hurry Providence, but remain in a State of Suspence, or abide where you are; waiting upon the LORD in the Way of Prayer, and waiting for the LORD in the Way of his Providence: And you need not fear, but that, as soon as it is needful for you to determine, God will by his Providence either hedge up the wrong Way, by making it impracticable, uncomfortable, unprofitable, or imprudent to you, and shut you up unto his chosen Way: Or else he will soon give you such a Turn in Affairs as shall turn the Scale; so that Conscience, Prudence, or a Desire of Usefulness will be sufficient to determine you; without your making any felt Impressions, or any supposed Revelations, the Rule of your Conduct.

(4.) I would lay before you the following general Rules, which suit to every Case, and so conclude. *In all Cases* let it be your perpetual Concern to keep as much as possible out of the Way of Temptation to omit any Duty, or commit any Sin. Let the sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer be always yours, and act accordingly: *Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil.*

*In all Cases* take the Word of God for your Rule: See whether there be any Thing in it, which, according to its proper Meaning, suits your Case; whether its

its Rules of Duty and its prudential Maxims will not help and direct you in deciding the Point. Compare the Declarations of the Word with the Dispensations of Providence towards you; and thence learn what the Lord requires of you in your present Circumstance. Be earnest with God, that his Spirit would bring such Texts or Truths to your Mind, as may be proper to direct you; and that he would give you a true Insight into them, and help your Thoughts to apply them to your Case, that you might rightly judge upon the Principles of Prudence and Conscience. And thus you will experimentally prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect Will of God; and will find the sacred Oracles to be a Light to your Feet, and a Lamp to your Path.

*In all Cases* keep up a Reverence for the Word and Providence of God upon your Hearts. Whatever these render unlawful or imprudent, look upon it to be against his Will, and accordingly avoid it: And what these render necessary from Conscience and Prudence, esteem it agreeable to his Will, and comply with it accordingly; not merely as your Choice, nor as invented by your Prudence; but as the Will of the LORD himself.

*In all Cases* have a steady Eye to his Glory. Let this be the grand View of your Minds, the grand Principle of your Conduct, and the grand Spring of your Actions. And if his Glory and your real spiritual Good lie uppermost in your Minds, it will be a most useful, valuable, and effectual Directory to your Actions. Lay to Heart that excellent Caution, Direction, and Encouragement, which are found together in Prov. iii. 5, 6, *Trust in the Lord with all thine Heart, and lean not to thine own Understanding. In all thy Ways acknowledge him: Acknowledge his Word by consulting it, his Hand*  
of

of Providence by observing it, *his Wisdom* by admiring it, *his Sovereignty* by acquiescing in it, *his Faithfulness* by relying on it, and *his Kindness* by being thankful for it: *And he shall direct thy Paths.*

Finally, *In every Case* let it be your great Concern and Desire to behold God in Covenant, as managing every providential Circumstance in Subserviency to his gracious Purposes in Christ Jesus. He, as a Covenant-God, has committed the Management of the Kingdom of Providence, as well as of Grace, into the Hands, the faithful, powerful, and gracious Hands of our exalted Redeemer: For Christ *has all the Power both in Heaven and Earth*; and this Power is given him *on Purpose that he should give eternal Life to as many as were given him.* Beholding every Circumstance as thus conducted by the Lord Jesus, in Pursuance of the Designs of the everlasting Covenant, will alleviate every Trial, will sweeten every Cross, and add a double Sweetness to every providential Favour. If Providence renders our present Situation uncomfortable, a Sight of God's Love in Christ will make us contented, till there be an Opening for our Escape. If Providence renders our abiding in our present State impracticable or unlawful, the viewing Jesus Christ at the Helm of all Affairs will enable us boldly to venture out in his Name and Strength into any unknown or rugged Path, which Necessity or Duty may drive us into. When two different Situations are offered to our Choice; here is now a Trial of our Love to God in Christ: For the Head of the Church brings his People into such a State of Suspence, in order to try what Influence our Love to his Name, our Regard to his Word, and our View to his Honour, will have upon the deciding our Conduct. And, if we could always view such Circumstances in Providence as

Trials

Trials of our Choice, this very Thought would be a great Means of quickening and directing our Way. If Providence keeps us for a Time in such a State of Sufferance, we should look upon this as a Trial of our Patience, to see whether we can wait upon the Lord, and believe in his Salvation.

Thus, whatever our Circumstances are, a real Belief of God's Love and Faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ, and a realizing View of Providence as in his Hands, will be found of eminent Service to keep us close to our Duty, and to keep us from entering into any forbidden Path; to keep our View upon the Honour of Christ, and to keep our Faith from failing, our Patience from being exhausted, and our Souls from misinterpreting and misimproving the Dispensations of Providence towards us.

C A S E





## CASE XII.



*Should not a Person, who is not comfortably persuaded of his being a real Christian, abstain from the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lest he should eat and drink Damnation to himself? — And, what Method must that Person take to satisfy a Church of Christ of his being a real Christian, who cannot relate any particular Experiences of the Dealings of God with his Soul?*

THESE Questions are of great Importance, and therefore deserve a distinct Consideration. They were occasioned by two Letters sent to me, one of which is as follows, viz.

*Reverend Sir,*

“ I SHOULD be glad you would resolve the following Case, on the *Wednesday* Night, as soon as Opportunity will permit. — A Person has some Hopes he has experienced a real saving Change, and is therefore desirous of waiting upon Christ at his Table; but is greatly discouraged, from a View of what the Apostle says upon this Subject, *1 Cor. xi. 27, 29.* This Passage has occasioned the following Thoughts, viz. If he has really experienced a saving Change, he shall be saved, whether he is a Partaker of this Ordinance or not: But on the other hand, if he should be deceived with Regard to the State of his Soul, he then must eat and drink Damnation to himself,

“ himself, and so be excluded from even any future  
 “ Hopes of being saved at all. What therefore must  
 “ he do in these Circumstances ?”

**T**HIS short Letter expresses the Sentiments of many a Christian. The Person who wrote it, is desirous of attending the Ordinance of the *Lord's Supper*, but is not satisfied that he is a Child of God, and is therefore afraid of *eating and drinking Damnation to himself*. The Word *Damnation* fills him with a peculiar Awe, and sets his Soul a trembling — “ Is this the Consequence ? says he. Oh ! what shall I do ? How must I act ? Must I attend in these Circumstances, when I know not but my Soul may be ruined for ever ? Is it not rather my Duty to abstain from the Ordinance, as it is not absolutely necessary to my Salvation ? Here are two Things that present themselves before me : (1.) I may be saved, and yet not attend at the *Lord's Table*. (2.) I am not sure but on attending I may eat and drink *Damnation* to myself. What therefore must I do ?” — Thus we see the Difficulty this Person is under ; to endeavour to remove which, and to quicken all that love our *Lord Jesus Christ* to the chearful Discharge of their Duty, I would,

I. *Inquire whether a Person may not satisfy himself in abstaining from the Lord's Supper, because it is not a saving Ordinance ?* This is too often pleaded as an Excuse by those who come not to the *Table* : But it will appear weak, as well as ungrateful, if we consider these two Things —

1. *Though the Lord's Supper is not a saving, yet it is an useful Ordinance.* A Person may be saved, who never appeared at the *Lord's Table*. This Consideration should

should be an Encouragement to those, who are deprived by the Providence of God of the Opportunity: But it should be no Encouragement to Negligence, when we are called to attend. If it is not necessary to the *Being* of a Christian, it is to his *Well-being*. Some make a *Saviour* of it: They are never easy, till they have had this Ordinance administered to them: As if the bare receiving it was sufficient to wipe away every Sin, and to entitle a Person at once to the Salvation of Christ. Others slight and neglect it. How happy to be kept from these two Extremes! This Ordinance was not designed to be a standing Means of awakening and converting Sinners, but it was of carrying on the Work of Grace in the Heart, and of training up the Soul for Heaven. Particularly, it is designed to give us a greater Hatred of Sin, and fill our Souls with a deeper Humiliation for it. And this it does, as it exhibits all the Riches of a Redeemer's Love, all the Glories of his Cross. A View of these, under the Influences of the Spirit, powerfully, though sweetly, works upon an ingenuous Mind, and comes with an Energy that nothing can withstand.

—“ Oh, says the Christian, the Hatefulness of Sin!  
 “ Canst thou love it, O my Soul? Canst thou fondly  
 “ embrace and pursue it? Oh, melt, melt, my hard  
 “ Heart! Why dost thou not move to see thy pierced  
 “ Saviour; a Saviour pierced for thee, pierced by thee?  
 “ Dost thou not rise with Repentment against the cruel  
 “ and obstinate Jews, who thus put the Son of God to  
 “ a painful and ignominious Death? But oh, stop thy  
 “ Repentment against them, and look at home! Thy  
 “ Sins, O my Soul, were the Murderers of thy Lord!  
 “ These were the Nails that fastened him to the ac-  
 “ cursed Tree! These the Spear that wounded his Side,  
 “ that covered his Body with a bloody Sweat, and pre-

"pased the bitter Cup he drank ! Oh weep, mourn, O my Soul ! Be ever humble under a Sense of Sin, and dishonour not that Jesus, who loved thee, and gave himself for thee !"

Again, *This Ordinance tends to enliven and strengthen our Graces, and to bring us into a greater Conformity to God.* When we are sitting and viewing the matchless Love of Christ, it tends to fasten the deepest Convictions of our Obligations to him upon our Minds, and to increase our Love to him. It tends to strengthen our Faith in him, under a Sense of our Guilt and Unworthiness, to reconcile us to every Difficulty, to quicken us when slothful, to restore us when wandering, to wear our Affections from earthly Things, and carry on the Work of God in the Soul. "Oh, says the Christian, see what Love ! And shall I loiter thus ? Shall I be so cold to Jesus ? Oh, why does not the Fire burn within me ? Why so slothful ? Up, O my Soul ! and let thy Redeemer's Glory be ever thy Concern, as thy everlasting Salvation was his."

Again, *This Ordinance tends greatly to promote our spiritual Comfort.* Here, behold a Father's Love ! He parts with his only-begotten Son, and delivers him up to an accursed Death, for us ! Here, see the Saviour's Heart, how much it is set upon our Salvation ! View here the Virtue, the Glory of an infinitely atoning Sacrifice ! See Justice sheathing its awful Sword, Death and Hell vanquished, the uttermost Farthing paid, and all the Blessings of Salvation fully purchased ! Oh, here behold a Righteousness provided, the Promises confirmed, and Grace and Glory both secured to every chosen Vessel ! How animating, how comforting such a View ! — "Oh, how glorious ! says the Christian. See, O my Soul, thy Saviour's Love ! And wilt thou any more distrust him ?

“him? View the Triumphs of the Cross! And wilt thou any longer be afraid? Oh, what a Foundation is here laid for a strong Faith and a lively Hope!”

Again, *This Ordinance tends to increase our Love to one another.* ‘Tis a cementing Ordinance. It can hot, but raise in us a mutual Affection, whilst we view each other as purchased by the same Blood, Members of the same Body, and Children of the same Family. — Thus then, though it may not be absolutely necessary to our Salvation to wait upon Christ at his Table; yet it is necessary to our Growth in Grace, our greater Comfort here, and Fitness for a better World; and therefore it is our Duty and our Privilege to appear amongst his People there. But,

2. *Christ himself instituted this Ordinance, and invites his Followers to wait upon him here.* What our Lord said to his Disciples, he says also to us in this distant Age, \* *Do this in Remembrance of me.* And where is the Expression of our Love, where our Gratitude, if we refuse to obey? — “Oh, says the Soul, has my Redeemer commanded those that love him to wait upon him here? This Command is enough for me: I cannot but obey. Who can resist his Love? Who can hear the compassionate Jesus, who came and suffered Death; who can hear him inviting his dear Followers to his Table, and say, *I will not come, for I may be saved without it?* How disingenuous is this!” — What, has he, who loved us so as to give himself for us, called us? And will you not obey his Call, because you may get safe to a better World, and yet never attend at this Ordinance? Where is your Concern to honour your Redeemer? — These Hints, I hope, are sufficient to shew the Weakness of this Argument, the Christian is so ready

\* 1 Cor. ii. 24.

to make Use of for his Neglect of this Institution, and to stir him up to a diligent and chearful Discharge of his Duty, that he may glorify his once dead, but now exalted Saviour, and gain some saving Advantage to his own Soul. I now proceed,

II. *To consider the other Objection, which our Friend makes to his waiting upon Christ in this Ordinance, viz. a Fear, lest he should eat and drink Damnation to himself.* This Objection seems to lie in your Mind, my dear Christian Friend, thus — “ If I should eat and drink unworthily, I shall eat and drink Damnation to myself; and I am not sure that this will not be the Case: “ Therefore shall I attend, when the Consequences may be so awful? Oh, that Word *Damnation*, it strikes me “ with a peculiar Terror!” — Thus the greatest Stress appears to be laid upon this alarming Word. If then I can set this Circumstance in such a Light, as to remove these distressing Fears, I hope the Case will be in some Measure resolved. That this may be done, I would consider, *what that unworthy Eating and Drinking is, which is brought in as the Cause of this Damnation, and then the Damnation itself.*

First, *Let us inquire what it is to eat and drink unworthily.* He that does so, attends upon this Ordinance in a Manner, and with Ends and Views different from those which it was appointed, This was the Case with the *Corinthians\**. They had not the Glory of Christian View, when they met together to administer this Ordinance. They fell into Contentions and Confusions, so that there could not be that Harmony, which was necessary to be found in a Church sitting down together at the *Lord's Table*. They came not to view the *Body* and

\* 1 Cor. xi. 18 — 22.

*Blood of Christ*, or to remember his matchless Love, but to satisfy their craving Appetites, and refresh animal Nature; and they were so disorderly, that some even eat and drank to an Excess, whilst others had not enough to satisfy their Hunger. Thus we see what it is to *eat and drink unworthily*, viz. when we attend in an irreverent, disorderly, and carnal Manner, and for Ends different from those for which the Ordinance was appointed by our Lord; when we prostitute it to some earthly Purposes, and have no Regard to the Frame of Soul in which we attend, or to the great Ends to be answered by it.

Secondly, *Let us now consider what this Damnation is.* And,

1. *Taking the Word in the most awful Sense, as signifying eternal Condemnation, it should not deter us from waiting upon Christ in this Ordinance.* In this Case it does not signify, that there is no Forgiveness after an *unworthily Receiving*. Many have sat down at the Table of our Lord, who were Enemies to him, and yet have afterwards been the Triumph of sovereign Grace. Thus, ye timorous Souls, who are so often distressed with a View of this *awful Word*, and entertain from hence such solemn Thoughts of this Ordinance, see, here is nothing to affright you from this, any more than from any other sacred Institution. You may as well not *read, hear, or pray*; because, if these are not the Means of your *Salvation*, the Consequence will be your *Damnation*. Doubtless, all the Ordinances the impenitent Sinner has attended upon, will appear against him, and increase his Misery in the infernal Regions. But this should not drive us from the House of God, but fill us with a serious Concern that our waiting upon God may be effectual to bring our Souls to Jesus Christ. — But,

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2. *The Word Damnation is to be taken in a softer Sense, viz.*

(1.) *It signifies temporal Judgments or Afflictions.* Thus the Apostle explains it, when he adds in the next Verse, *For this Cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* As if he had said, As you come to the Table of the Lord in so disorderly a Manner, and have perverted the End and Design of this Ordinance, for God has manifested his Displeasure, by laying his Hand upon you, in so much that many of you are in an unhealthy, feeble, and sickly Condition, and many have been removed out of Time into Eternity. Thus this Word *Damnation* carries nothing frightful in it.

(2.) *It signifies here such Afflictions as are a Means of our spiritual Good.* Thus says the Apostle, Ver. 32. *But, when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the World.* That is, when we are thus under outward Afflictions, we are mercifully chastened and gently corrected of God, that we may not continue prostituting his sacred Ordinances to the vilest Purposes, and so be condemned with the World; but that we may be convinced, humbled, and reclaimed. Thus, these Considerations take every frightful Idea from the Mind, viewing this formidable Word, and consequently tend to remove those Distresses and Discouragements occasioned by it.

Some perhaps may say, This is encouraging indeed! You say, a Person's unworthy Receiving does not expose him to eternal Damnation, but only brings upon him a few temporal Afflictions, which are in reality Blessings: So that by this you give Encouragement to Persons to come and trifle with this sacred Ordinance. — God forbid, that I should have such a View as this! This, I

\* Luke xxiii. 40. Chap. xxiv. 20. 1 Pet. iv. 17.



am certain, is far from being the Conclusion a real Christian will draw from what has been said. To do Evil, that Good may come, is not the Character of a true Fellow of *Jesus*. Because God only gently chastises and corrects our Negligence and Slothfulness, and makes these Corrections a Means of our spiritual Good, shall we therefore rush boldly upon this Ordinance? No. What has been said, only tends to remove the distressing Fears of the Christian about the Word *Damnation*, and to encourage him to come to the Table of his Lord; and does not promote a Carelessness of Spirit, nor will have this Influence upon a Minister under the Power of Gospel Truths.

Come then, ye fearful Souls, who start at the Mention of this Ordinance. Do you not love *Jesus*? Have you not made Choice of him as your Saviour? Would you not love him more, and be brought into a greater Conformity to him? You are the very Persons Christ invites. Would you prostitute this Ordinance to any vile earthly Purpose? Would you eat and drink in a disorderly and indecent Manner? No. You would come to remember the Love of a dying Redeemer, and to view all that is here exhibited: You would come to be quickened, to behold a suffering Saviour, to admire the Riches of distinguishing Grace, in the Sacrifice of the Son of God: But you are afraid you are unworthy, unfit Persons to make such an Approach to God, and be indulged with such a Privilege. If it be thus with you, don't be discouraged. Venture near your Redeemer. Come humbly to view your expiring Lord, and to plead and rest upon his atoning Sacrifice; and you will be far from eating and drinking *Damnation* in your *Jesus*. If you were to come for some selfish Ends, to the Way to worldly Advancement or Profit, and

to pay no Regard to the *Body and Blood* of a *Saviour*, you might have Reason to conclude you were *unworthy Receivers*. But; if you have a humble Sense of your Sinfulness, if you desire to come looking to *Jesus*, that you may be strengthened, sanctified, and quickened; you need not be afraid, but come with Liberty and Chearfulness. He that has invited you, will make you welcome, and carry on his Work in you by all the Ordinances he has appointed.

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the first Question.

Since I received this, the second Question was sent me, which I thought not improper to add here. *A Person looks upon it as his Duty to wait upon Christ in this Ordinance: But the Church with whom he would walk, require him to give an Account of the Dealings of God with his Soul. As he cannot relate any particular Experience of this, so he wants to know what he must do in this Difficulty.*

This, you see, is a general Question, and leaves us at a Loss to know wherein the particular Difficulty of this Person lies. I shall therefore endeavour to state it in two or three different Views, and then shew what a Person must do to satisfy a Church in such Circumstances.

You are desirous of waiting upon *Christ* in all the Ordinances of his House; but you cannot relate any Experience of God's Dealings with you, so as to give the Church Satisfaction in admitting you to the Enjoyment of such a Privilege. *Perhaps you mean by this, that you cannot relate the particular Time and Circumstances of your Conversion.* This was the Case with many of those happy Souls, who are now standing before the Throne of God; and I doubt not, but it is thus with many of those of whom the Churches of *Christ* are composed

composed here. Some God sanctifies from the Womb : In others, the Change, though effectually made, yet is done imperceptibly. To require of such an Account of their Conversion, or to refuse them because they are incapable of giving it, is what no Church of Christ has a Right to, and therefore should be no Stumbling to you.

Again, *Perhaps you have had no extraordinary remarkable Circumstances, in the Course of your Experience, to relate to the Church ; and this may therefore involve you in some Difficulty.* God does not deal with all his People in the same Way. Some are led smoothly and silently on from Step to Step. They are savingly enlightened, and brought to Jesus, are carried on through the divine Life, and get safe to Glory, without any Noise, or any Thing very remarkable in their Experience. They appear to be almost always the same, and yet go on from Strength to Strength. This may be your Case, my Friend. Others can give an Account of *great Distresses, great Consolations and Enjoyments, great Meltings of Soul in Ordinances and Duties, &c.* And because you cannot do the same, you are afraid you have no real Experience of renewing Grace. You have but very little to say, and that to no Purpose, in your own Apprehensions. But consider, those Accounts are not always genuine, that appear to be the most striking ; nor do these always turn out eminent Christians, who are so long and so circumstantial in their Declarations. — But your Question returns — *What must you do in your present Case ?*

1. *If you cannot remember the Time and Circumstances of your Conversion, and how the Work has been carried on, inquire into the Evidences you can give of a Change, and relate them to the Church.* You know, my Friend, whether you have made a Practice of sinning or not ; whether

ther Sin has been the Object of your Delight. If this has been the Case, you have no Experience of the Grace of God. But, if you hope it has been your Concern to hate Sin, to have your Corruptions subdued, and to have your Heart cleansed from those secret Evils, which have appeared detestable to you, and have caused you daily to mourn before God; if you have strove and prayed against them, and longed for Deliverance from them; you have a comfortable Evidence of your being a Christian indeed.

Again, *Have you been diligent in the Use of those Means God has appointed?* And what are your Views herein? Is it to atone for Sins you have committed, to establish a Righteousness to justify you before God, or to answer some selfish Purposes? You have then no Reason to conclude that you are a Christian. But, if it has been out of Obedience to the Command of God, to meet with him, to feel the quickening, sanctifying Influences of the Spirit, and to be fitted more for Heaven, this is another Evidence of your having received the Grace of God.

Again, *Is Christ precious to you?* Have you committed your Soul, so far as you know yourself, into his Hands? Do you see a Suitableness in all his Characters? In fine, is he your all and in all? Never say then that you have no saving Experience; for what is this?—Go, my Friend, and tell the Church, that though you are not able to fill up a Sheet with a long Detail of remarkable Circumstances, yet you hope you see yourself guilty, you hate Sin, have fled for Refuge to Jesus the Mediator, and have left your Soul with him; that he is precious to you, you have taken him for your Lord, your Portion, your All, and desire to bear his Image, and to live to his Glory. Is not this enough to give Satisfaction?

faction? — But perhaps you cannot positively say, this is the Case with you. You are under great Fears, lest your Heart should deceive you. — Declare your Fears then, as well as your Hopes, and leave your Case to the Decision of the Church, praying that they may be guided in their Duty towards you.

2. *Examine the present Frame of your Soul with Regard to this Ordinance.* You say, you have no Account to give of God's Dealings with you, and yet you are convinced that it is your Duty to wait upon *Christ* at his *Table*. Now, if you have no real Experience of the Grace of God, you have no proper Claim to this Privilege. I would ask you therefore, and would beg you to ask yourself, whence it is that you are satisfied it is your Duty? A due Examination of this will, in some Measure, lay before you the Ends you have in View in desiring to attend this solemn Institution, and be a Means of furnishing you with something to say to the Church to direct them as to your Admission amongst them. — Do you apprehend then it is the Duty of every common Professor, and therefore yours, to appear at the *Lord's Table*? If this is all we have to say, we are guided by a blind and ignorant Zeal. But further, are you desirous of coming to this *Ordinance*, as you will be hereby more peculiarly entitled to the Divine Favour, or that it will gain you Reputation amongst those you converse with? This shews how much you are unacquainted with the Nature of the Ordinance, and the Gospel Method of Salvation, and that it is far from being your Duty to attend. I would hope better Things of you, my Friend. But whence is it then, that you see it your Duty? Have you any Reason to hope that you have given up yourself to Jesus Christ, and do you see your Presence at the *Table* necessary to testify your Love

Love publicly to him? Do you look upon it as useful to quicken, strengthen, and comfort the Soul? Do you see any Excellency in it, as being peculiarly adapted, and made effectual, by the Spirit, to crucify our Lusts and Corruptions, to enliven our Graces, to kindle a Fire of Love to Jesus, and help to keep alive a Sense of our Obligations to him? In fine, do you desire to come here, that you may view a crucified *Saviour*, feel the Influences of his Love more on your Heart, and be engaged to a more lively Obedience? Do you desire to come as a miserable, guilty, naked Creature to Christ, as exhibited in this Ordinance, to plead his Sacrifice, and to lie at the Foot of his Cross mourning for your Sins? These are Views suitable to this Institution, shew that you are a Christian indeed, that you have a real Experience, and that you have a Right to all the Privileges of God's House. To sum up all, if this is the Case with you, God has been manifesting himself to your Soul, as he does not to the World, and you have Reason to be abundantly satisfied. Go then, and tell the Church what you have seen, what you have felt, what is your present Frame, what the Foundation of your Hopes, and what you trust your Desires, your Ends and Views are; and all this, I doubt not, will appear to them as a sufficient Evidence of a Work of Grace in your Heart, and therefore of your Right to all the Ordinances God has appointed.

F I N I S.



